

The
Skein of Life
W.R. Mackay

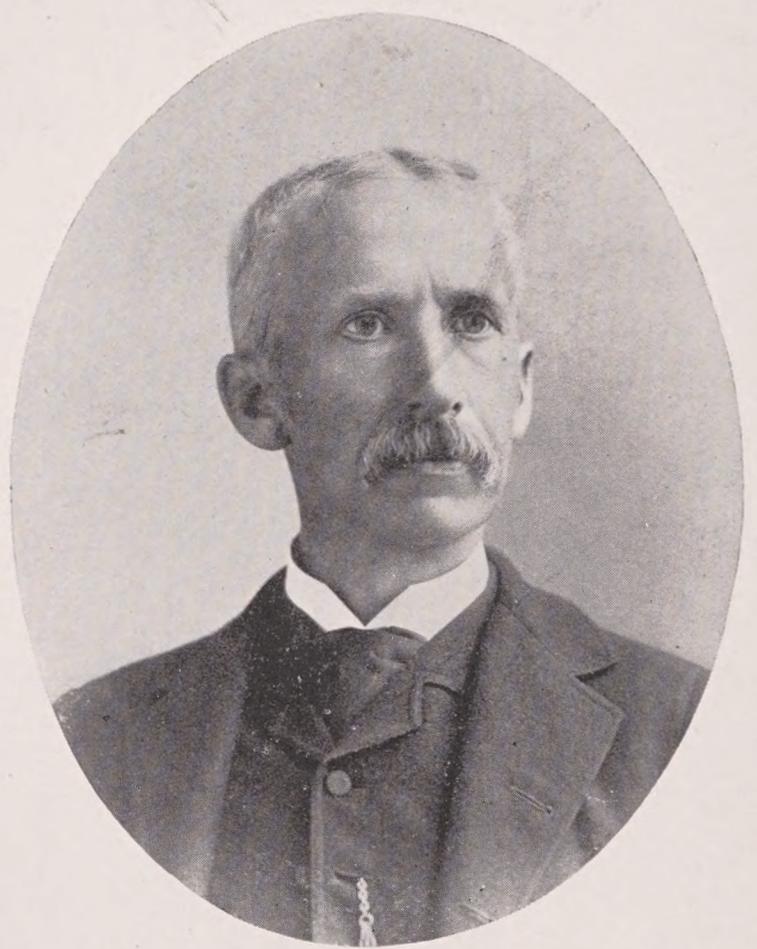
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THE SKEIN OF LIFE



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✓ BY
WM. R. MACKAY, D.D.
(W. RICARD)



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BY
E. M. MACKAY.

Editor's Preface

“THE Skein of Life” seems a fitting title for this book of short stories, by the late rector of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. They are more than stories,—they are bits of the “warp and woof” of real life; adventures, incidents, experiences, episodes which have come to the knowledge of our late pastor, or in which he and his brothers have taken part.

I say “our pastor,” and yet it is not as the man of God—strong, sincere, helpful, true, “faithful unto death”—as we have known him that he appears in these pages.

As such, how many tangles in the skein of our lives he has lovingly helped to unravel; how many broken ends he has patiently fastened together!

But he comes before us here as an author of short stories, briefly, entertainingly told.

Some of these are published for the first time,

EDITOR'S PREFACE

For permission to reprint those which have previously appeared, thanks are due to *Lippincott's Magazine*, *Harper's Young People*, and *The Youth's Companion*.

The book is published for the benefit of *the one* left most bereaved, and for the five young daughters, whose skein of life seemed all tangled and torn when the beloved father was called to the higher life,—

MAY 13, 1896.

“They never die who live in the hearts of their friends.”

SARAH H. KILLIKELLY.

PITTSBURGH, PA.

Note

AS we read a story, do we always connect the author with it? Do we see him, a person gifted with supernatural power, gliding here and there among the many characters whose lives make up the little tale; whole lives with their inevitable shares of joy and sorrow, which are their inheritance in this life, told in a few pages, and read in a few hours?

Do we see him with a key to every door, and the threads of the fate of all held in his hand to be woven as he thinks fit? Do we realize his actual personal acquaintance with each and all? I think the author of these little tales will stand clearly before the minds of those who read them, with the strong light of the love he has won in so many hearts shining full upon him.

See, let us open the study-door and look in on him there. The desk crowded with papers—the arm-chair—he is sitting with the light from the window shining down on his silvery hair. Is he in Bermuda with “Captain Johnson”? The pen goes rapidly over the page. But while we pause there the door is softly opened, and two little girls run over and stand beside the chair. Bermuda grows faint in the distance as

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he admires the antics a pencil has been making on paper guided by the uncertain childish hand. And he ties the doll's sash and promises to come and play "hide and seek" before the day is over. But they must be dressed up "to look like papa," and with a merry laugh and a soft "bless their dear little hearts" he sees them march proudly away with stiff white collars, neckties, and smoking caps on their fair curly heads. The closed study-door is no barrier to them, and the busy man, with the cares few realized, the noble disciple of God, is to them their dearest play-fellow and companion.

They have gone back to their play forgetting to close the door. We must go back to our play, or work. Shall we not also leave the door open so we may often in our hearts go and be near him? not in the study which is a room, but the study of the great love he bore to God and all God's creatures, feeling the lessons he taught us of truth, forgiveness, and faith sink deeper and deeper into our hearts; realizing more in our heart's communion with the soul that taught us, and which teaches us still, our nearness to that great eternal peace which is now his, and which reward is waiting for all those who love the Lord.

HIS DAUGHTER.

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The Reverend Erasmus

I

“**S**MIT, the Pawnbroker, will occupy this store on April 1st.” That is what the card in the window said, and that is what the Rev. Erasmus Burton read on it as he went past it every day. It was a new store, built in the sharp angle made by two narrow streets which came together in an attempt to make a Y, and finished it by going off together in one wide street which did the wholesale business for the city of Ironton, and which seemed by its imposing fronts and five-storied grandeur to disclaim all relationship with the paternal and maternal retail streets which lengthened out the arms of the Y as if they wanted to get away from each other as well as from their unnatural offspring. But the new store in the corner had no such idea. It was nearly finished, some inside work remaining to be done, and, with the broad plate-glass windows, which came together at the sharp nose of brick wall, it seemed to be saying, “I have my eye on you, Mr. Wholesale,—I know all about you: we’ll see what we’ll see.”

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That, at any rate, was the fancy which often crossed the mind of the Rev. Erasmus on his daily walk. The corner building seemed such a pushing, sharp, antagonistic kind of building, he thought it had its eye on him too, and no matter which of the two streets at the angle he might choose, it always had one eye for him, and that eye always wide open, without even a blind to act as an occasional eyelid to soften the straight-out stare.

And when the card appeared in each window it added to the uncanny effect. The personality of "Smit, the Pawnbroker" seemed to be already in the empty store, as if the sharpness and cunning of its angular aspect were only the outward expression of the invisible "Smit" who was to be its soul. It had a kind of fascination for the minister: it seemed to come up against him as he came along, and to hold out its card, "Smit the Pawnbroker," and he got to look for it and to find himself mentally counting off how many days remained until the owner of the card would appear and offer himself instead of it.

Why the Rev. Erasmus Burton should have cared at all about it is another question. As he came along the street that blustering March day he was not exactly a prepossessing figure. In age a little over forty years; of middle

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height, thin, hollow-chested, and stooping ; bald as to the top of his head, with long, straggling locks at the sides ; a smooth face, with mild blue eyes, to which spectacles gave an added timidity ; a clerical coat buttoned up close to the neck, very shiny and worn, and suggesting a possibly frail condition of linen within ; the coldest day in winter had not added an over-coat, and the warmest day in summer never loosened a button of the only coat he seemed to have. His manner was shy and gentle ; he took the smallest share of the pavement, and seemed grateful for even so much of it to the brisk business man or heavy-footed laborer going by : the whole man, in figure, in look, in dress, in walk, in everything, seemed to be offering an apology for being in the world at all ; and the busy travellers on the street took him readily at his word and passed him by as if he were not there, neither in nor belonging to their world. Even those who knew his face knew little more about him : they had heard that he had charge of St. Margaret's, a little Episcopal church of ritualistic tendencies, in the poorest quarter of the city, among the iron-mills and workshops, and those who cared to inquire further only knew that he had "rooms" in Penn Street, just off the wholesale thoroughfare mentioned.

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It was to Penn Street that he was now going, and his queer figure turned down its narrow pavement, where he seemed to take up even less room than before, and stopped at a modest house which bore the motto "Boarding" on a tin strip nailed to the front window next the door.

As he passed through the narrow hall and ascended the still narrower stairs, a door opened below and a woman's voice asked, "Is that you, Mr. Burton?"

In a thin voice, which again seemed making an apology for being heard, he replied,—

"Yes, madam, it is I;" and then waited as if expecting something more. The something more was only the closing of the door and the unheard exclamation of the landlady as she went back to the fire.

"Bless the man! he's a-wearing of himself out with them saints' days and what-nots of his, and precious little saint to take care of him!" And she sat down with some force to give emphasis to her words and took up her work-basket. "Blest if I know what's to be done for him, though: he won't hear to my doing anything for him, and he's just that proud in his own way that a body can't so much as look help at him. 'I have no wants, Mrs. Brown,' he says; 'and

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the Lord takes care of his servants.' I am sure I hope he does. There he goes now, putting coal on his fire. Bought his own coal, and I b'lieve knows how much he has got, to a lump, —as he well may, for there's little enough of it. Pays his rent always prompt, though them people that he slaves himself for are owin' him enough, I'll be bound, and he never asks them for a cent of it. 'I hope your people pays you regular, Mr. Burton,' I says to him one day. 'The Lord takes care of me,' he says, in that exasperating mild way of his. It's a blessing he isn't married. Lord, what would two such innocents do in a world like this?" And Mrs. Brown fell into silent reflection on the mysteries of providence in general.

And one of the mysteries was why all the world did not see as she did, that the Methodist Church was the only sure road to heaven. "I'm not sayin'," she often remarked to her friend and crony, Mrs. Rafter, "I'm not sayin' that there ain't other roads in plenty. I hope there are, and that them that walks on them will get there; but to my thinkin' there's only one road that is a sure one, and sign-posts all the way for them as is fools and will go therein; and for me there ain't nothin' that does so well as Brimstone Corner."

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It might seem at first glance that the good woman had chosen a very uncertain starting-place for the end she was hoping to arrive at. But Mrs. Rafter, listening sympathetically, was aware that "Brimstone Corner" was the popular, though peculiar, title of the large Methodist edifice near by, and the one that owned Mrs. Brown as one of its most active members.

A spasmodic twitching of the bell-wire, in answer to a pull outside, had ushered in Mrs. Rafter on this particular evening, and when mutual inquiries after each other's health had been duly asked and answered, Mrs. Brown took up again with her knitting the train of thought on which she had been engaged when her visitor arrived.

"Now, there's that Episcopal," she said, indicating with her knitting-needle the floor above; "I make no doubt he's a good man in his way, and so, perhaps, are the folks as goes to his church; but what's the use of all his crossin's and bowin's and keepin' of saints' days and such carryin's on? Why, ma'am,"—and she laid her work down on her lap for a more earnest gaze at her hearer,—"it ain't no better than them deluded Catholics, what would burn us all to-morrow if it wasn't that they're afeard to. It fairly gives me the creeps to think of it."

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“And well it may,” assented Mrs. Rafter, who had a great respect for her strong-minded friend; “well it may, and it’s a blessing that some folks has their eyes wide open.”

“I don’t keep mine shut, Mrs. Rafter, any more than I have to in my natural sleepin’ time. And such pictures as he has upstairs, and things. Why, if he wasn’t so good and gentle-like, and means well, I know I’d be afraid to sleep for a minute for thinkin’ I had a inquisition over my head, or one of them desperate things what I hear about in Brimstone Corner.”

Mrs. Rafter shook her head and raised her eyebrows as if appalled at the supposed danger. She had, however, an indistinct idea that the figure which she had met in the hall on previous visits was not of a specially dangerous order, and she now threw in cautiously a modifying word. “He seems to be a quiet enough lookin’ man—on the outside.”

“Outside?” said Mrs. Brown, who, apart from her theology, was as warm-hearted a Christian as breathed, and had all her motherly instincts on the side of her lodger; “outside and in he’s as good and hard workin’ a man as there is anywheres, and there ain’t no one that I wishes more good to.”

“Well, well,—to be sure,” replied Mrs. Rafter,

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a little bewildered as to the exact point from which Mrs. Brown was sailing; and, not feeling that she could steer her own craft free in such uncertainties of navigation, thought it better to crowd on all canvas—to wit, her bonnet and shawl—and sail away.

Meanwhile, the subject of the conversation had been busy upstairs. A small front room, lighted by two windows, comprised the extent of the “rooms” with which a generous public had vaguely endowed him. A bed took up one side of it; a table was in the centre, on which were a Bible, a Greek Testament, and some loose papers; a small bookcase of stained pine held some volumes of “The Fathers,” the “Tracts for the Times,” and various books of devotional reading; on the walls were a few engravings, one of the Virgin, one of St. Anthony, one of St. Sebastian pierced with arrows; and in a little recess was a prayer desk, and back of it, on a bracket on the wall, a crucifix; a couple of common chairs completed the furnishing.

He had made his fire in the little grate, putting on the bits of coal with a care which argued a scientific calculation of how to get the greatest possible heat out of the smallest possible quantity, and now put a tiny kettle on the coals, and brought out of a closet a plate, a knife, a loaf of

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bread, a sugar-bowl, and a cup and saucer. There was a womanliness in the way he did this and in the way he made the tea in a little tin tea-pot and set it on the grate to draw; and when he stood at the table and put his hands together and said grace over his simple meal, and cut the bread and dropped a lump of sugar in his tea with the same air of calculation that he had shown over the coals, it would have made a woman smile at him in her pity and say, "Bless the man!" as good Mrs. Brown said every day.

Not that the queerish, thin, tightly-buttoned figure at the table, with his bald head and straggling side hair and spectacled blue eyes, would have understood the pity if he had known it.

II

THE city of Ironton is known all over the country for its iron- and steel-mills, its furnaces and glass-works, and for the heavy cloud of smoke which is shut in upon the city by the surrounding hills, and always hangs over it like a gloomy pall. "A good thing to see, sir," the citizen of Ironton says, warmly, to the stranger visitor, "that smoke means wealth and comfort; thousands of men at work and good pay in their pockets, sir. No clear skies and poverty

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for us, sir ;” and he looks up lovingly at where the sun hangs like a round, red ball, as if a dome of smoked glass had been built over the city in view of a perpetual eclipse supposed to be going on above, and pretty generally realized.

Of wealth and comfort there seemed none to spare on the South Side, however ; it lay opposite the main city, on the other side of the river, and stretching along the river bottom, between the bank and the hills behind, for three miles. The people living there were crowded into narrow, dirty streets and alleys, between mills and manufactories which were heaped together along the river front and back against the hills. It was here that the smoke, belched out from the iron chimneys of the mills, and oozing out, black and sluggish, from the stacks of the glass-houses, hung heaviest and darkest ; and it was on the bridge, leading over from Smithfield Street to the South Side, that the Rev. Erasmus was standing on the afternoon of the day following his introduction to the reader.

A boy of about twelve years was looking up at him ; a five-cent chip hat was on his head ; a blue cotton shirt was diversified by suspenders of common ticking which held up a pair of jean pantaloons above the boy’s coarse shoes ; bright brown eyes looked out from under

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thick, brown hair, and there was a pleasant eagerness in the tone with which he spoke to the surprised clergyman, "Where will I find my brother Bill?"

The Rev. Erasmus stared at him in perplexity. "Who is your brother Bill?"

A look of disdain and almost of contempt came into the boy's eyes. "Don't you know my brother Bill?"

Erasmus glanced at him in meek apology for his ignorance of what must evidently be a well-known character, and replied, vaguely, "I, really—" and then, as a bright idea struck him, "What is your brother Bill's last name?"

"Whitestone," replied the boy, promptly, but with an additional touch of contempt for any one who could think a last name necessary.

Erasmus shook his head and turned his spectacles to the ice-cakes floating slowly in the sluggish, muddy stream and grinding against the piers of the bridge, as if light might possibly come from that direction or brother Bill be seen mysteriously among them. He turned again to the boy, who was still waiting, expectantly, "What does your brother do, my lad? Where does he work?"

"In a glass-works: he's a glass-blower, Bill

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is. There ain't no one like Bill," he added, with a pride that fairly beamed in every word.

"And how do you come to be here and not know where to find him?"

"Why, you see, mother and the girls and me have got a little bit of a farm in Washington County, 'bout eighteen miles from here. Hi is my name; short for Hiram. Father's there, too; but then he don't amount to much, and we don't usually count him. And Bill, why he was a good deal older'n me, and taught me lots, and could do most everything: there ain't no one anywheres like Bill. But he went and got married and come down here, and does first rate; only, you see, he's got a wife and little children and can't help much; and so, as times were hard and our farm ain't much more'n a garden-plot anyhow, I just says to mother, 'Mother, I'm goin' to the city, and work and get rich; and Bill'll show me how, and I'll send you the money, and you won't have to work so hard and look so thin and tired.' And she cried, and said she did not want for me to do it; but I knowed it was all right. And so she gave me this new shirt and them pants and suspenders, all bran new, and made'm for me all herself." And the brown eyes looked down with pride on the cotton shirt and the sus-

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penders of new ticking. "And so I got up bright and early and tramped it in. But I got kind o' lost in such crowds of people and roads of houses, and I didn't see Bill, and I was kind o' feared to ask the folks that was rushin' along everywhere in such a hurry; till I seen you, and then I says to myself, "He'll know. I guess he ain't tearin' along like the rest of 'em. And so——" He stopped and looked again, fearless and expectant.

Erasmus was still doubtful. "Do you know the name of the firm your brother works for?"

"I ain't right sure. Seems to me it was Hussem or something. But it's curious you don't know my brother Bill."

But Erasmus had his clue now, and feeling down in his pocket drew out a silver quarter. "The place you want is at Thirty-third Street; Thirty-third Street, remember. You take this car that is just coming towards us and tell the conductor to let you out at Thirty-third Street. This will pay your fare." And he held out the quarter.

The boy took it in his hand and looked at it. "My! does it take all this to get there?"

"No; not all of it. Never mind. Here's the car now and you must get on. You must be cold and very tired."

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There was no time for reply, and the boy jumped on the platform as the car went by, and gave his new friend a bright, grateful look as he turned to go inside.

It was afternoon and there were only a few people in the car, and Hi climbed up on the seat and knelt, looking out of the window. Such rows of dingy brick houses and stores, with saloons scattered thickly among them; short side streets, even dirtier and dingier than the narrow main avenue along which the car-track ran. Uneven brick pavements, worn into holes and left unmended, and vying with the cobble-stone streets in dirt and neglect, except where some spasmodic householder was squirting the loose dirt into looser mud with a hose, which jealously guarded the line of his particular premises and made his special spot look like the half-washed face of a dirty boy.

Great heavy wagons jolted from car-track to cobble-stones and back again, rattling the heavy iron bars with which they were loaded, and rattling every other noise deaf as they passed by. Lighter grocery-wagons coming and going, and men in working-clothes, and still the same long track ahead, as if Carson Street had no end.

Then an occasional vacant lot, which was seemingly used as a dump-place for cinders,

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more visions of smoke-stacks and long irregular buildings begrimed with smoke and dust, and then the conductor shot the door back,— “Thirty-third Street! Here’s your place!”

Hi got down and crossed the street and looked about him. Some men in their shirt-sleeves were going down a side street and he followed them. They turned through a gateway into a yard, and the boy saw with delight the name over the gateway, “Hussem, How & Co., Limited.” He went forward, and looking around for a moment, ran with a cry towards a man who was dashing water from a tub over his face and arms. “Bill! it’s me, Bill!”

The man stopped and looked up in surprise, and then a look of wonderment came over him as he picked up a rough towel from the ground and hastily rubbed it over his face and hands.

“Hi Whitestone! How in the name of the blessed fiddlesticks did you come here?” The boy leaped into his arms and kissed him.

“I walked, Bill,—walked all the way; and I’ve come to get rich and have you show me how and lots of things.” His eyes were dancing with delight. It was all right now, since Bill was here and he had found him.

“Well, well, Hi,—we’ll see about that. But how did you find me out?”

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“Well, I most give it up, when I met a queer sort of a chap on a bridge an’ he helped me. He didn’t seem to know much ; but he found out at last where you was, and he gave me a quarter and put me on a car, and I’ve more money left than I ever had before.”

“What sort of a looking man ?”

“Kind of tall, and had glasses, and bent over-like, and with a black coat up to his chin.”

Bill burst into a laugh. “That’s Giglamps to a dot.”

“Giglamps ? What does he do, Bill ?”

“Well, Hi, he’s in the candle business, mostly, and in the millinery ;” and Bill chuckled over his information as if he enjoyed it.

“Candles, Bill ? and millinery ?”

“Yes, in a church sort o’ way, down yonder,” and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder ; “but I guess he don’t harm anybody in particular.”

“Well, I don’t care what’s his business, he was kind to me and helped a feller when he didn’t have no friend nowhere.”

“That’s right, Hi ; he’s no bad chap, if he does take to candles and them things. I don’t know much about them myself, not havin’ a likin’ that way ; but come on, I’m through for to-day, and we can go home now, and you can tell me all about the folks, and how you left ‘em.”

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He took down a coat from a post near by and led the way out the gate and towards the river, Hi walking proud and happy by his side.

A short walk brought them to a row of two-story brick houses, which had possibly looked fresh and new in their time, but had long ago given up the attempt and settled down into the dirty indifference of their neighbors. Three children were playing in a puddle of muddy water which stood in the gutter in front of the row, and Bill hailed them as he came near, "Here, you kids; here's your Uncle Hi come to see you; and a sweet-looking lot he finds you," he added, as the children got up from the pavement and stared shyly at the newcomer.

"Kiss 'em, Hi, and never mind the dirt. Jane says it ain't no use tryin' to keep 'em clean, and I guess she's mostly right about it."

And Hi didn't mind it; he kissed the tousle-headed, dirty little faces; he was ready to think anything beautiful that belonged to the big brother whom he had looked up to and believed in for so long, and, with the children pushing and shoving each other behind him, he followed Bill into the house.

A plain-featured woman, with the lines of hard work on her face, making her look older than

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she really was, came forward to meet them, looking at her husband for explanation of the stranger.

“This is my little brother, Jane; Hi, you know; the little chap I’ve told you about. He’s come in from the country and will stay with us a bit. I guess you can find room for him somewhere.”

The woman looked at the boy rather coldly, and then, meeting the frank, open gaze of the brown eyes, she came nearer and put her hands on his shoulders, and her face softened.

“And so you are the little Hi that Bill talks of?” Hi smiled and nodded, as if to say, “That’s it, I’m Hi; I knew Bill’d talk about me,” and Jane kissed the broad, open forehead, and Hi was at home.

III

IT was Sunday morning, and they were all at breakfast. Hi was resplendent in a new suit of fustian, which seemed to have been made originally for a boy twice his size, but which the clerk in the great clothing house of Kofferman & Co. had assured him was a perfect fit, “Just as if made for him.” Good stout shoes were on his feet, and he felt this morning that his mother would hardly know him in his splendor. Bill

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had found him work in picking up scraps and doing odd jobs about the glass-works of "Hussem, How & Co., Limited," at three dollars a week, and Hi felt that he was already in some way a member of the firm.

But it was the same boyish face, with bright eyes, which looked up at the head of the house as breakfast was concluded, and the same honest, eager voice which was speaking.

"Where do you go to church, Bill?"

"Well, Hi, I don't exactly go anywheres; that is to say, Jane goes sometimes to the Methodist church down here, and the kids go somewheres to the mission school in the afternoon. But there ain't nothing to prevent your goin' if you've a mind to. I don't interfere with no man's religion." Bill put his thumbs in his vest arm-holes, and said this with an off-hand air of great magnanimity, and Hi looked admiringly at him accordingly.

"An' where had I better go?"

"Oh, I don't know; there's the Methodist and the Baptist and—and, oh, lots of churches of all kinds here, and—there! why don't you go to see your friend, Giglamps, you know?"

"That's so," and Hi's eyes brightened.
"How'll I find it?"

"Nothing easier: it's down on Eighteenth

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Street. You just keep straight along Carson Street, and turn down to your right; I know a man that goes there." And Bill again swelled out, as if knowing a man who went there was a religious experience quite above the common.

Hi put on his hat and went out, for the church-bells could be heard ringing in various quarters of the city. There was less smoke in the sky, and the sunlight came through in a weak, watery sort of way, as if it were not quite sure of itself, and had better be cautious how it entered into unusual places; but still it did shine, and the silence of the mills, and the absence of the heavy teams and wheels grinding over the cobble-stones and stunning the ears with the jangling of their loads, gave quite a Sunday air to the surroundings.

He was at Eighteenth Street almost before he knew it, and, turning down, came soon to a little wooden church standing back from the street, and with a wooden fence in front of it. It had once been painted brown, but was now in sad need of a fresh coat of the same material; its lancet windows were patched here and there without any regard to the original color, if ever there had been any, and there was an unkept look about the yard, where no grass had ever seemed to grow on the black-looking ground.

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The door was open, and Hi lifted the gate-latch and went up the short cinder-covered walk. Hi looked in through the open door and hesitated, and then, seeing a few people already inside, took courage and slipped into the first seat next the door.

The church was very plain inside: a strip of cocoanut matting along the aisle served for a carpet; there were no cushions on the seats, and the kneeling-benches were severely penitential in their uncovered sharp edges. The altar at the chancel end made a faint show of "the beauty of holiness" by way of a crimson hanging, and above it on a little ledge was a large brass cross, and on either side of it was a candle in a tall brass candlestick. "There they are," said Hi to himself; "them's the candles."

People kept dropping in by twos and threes until the church was two-thirds full. The little bell overhead ceased tolling, a young lady took her place at the cabinet organ, which stood on the right, just below the chancel steps, and the irregular chords of a voluntary soon changed into the air of a hymn which was taken up by boyish voices in the distance. A door at the side of the chancel opened, and a dozen choristers, vested in cotta and cassock, entered and filed to their places, while the congregation rose

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and joined in the hymn. Hi got up, too; his attention had been so taken with the boys and their vestments that he had at first no eyes for anything else, and he was craning his head from side to side to see between the people in front of him when the singing ceased and a remembered voice began the exhortation. The peculiar meek-toned voice, though changed a little now by a half sing-song intonation, could not be mistaken, and, though the white surplice had taken the place of the closely-buttoned black coat, there was no mistaking the bald head and straggling side hair and weak blue eyes behind the spectacles.

“That’s him,” said Hi, almost speaking aloud in his excitement; “that Giglamps what gave me the money and helped me to find Bill.”

For the rest of the time his attention was equally divided between the rector and the choristers. He had never seen anything like this before, and had already made up his mind that there could be no position in life to be so envied as to be one of those boys and be dressed in white and sing with them in the choir.

At length it was over, and the congregation rose for the singing of the final hymn. The choristers, still singing, filed out slowly as they

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had come in, and as the vestry door closed behind them the last tones of the recessional came faintly and sweetly again as if from far away. Hi had stood up with the rest, and now, as the congregation came down the aisle, greeting acquaintances and exchanging comments and passing out into the street, he still stood there, looking towards the chancel until the young lady organist, shutting down the organ, came towards him in the now silent church and stopped and smiled kindly at him.

He pointed towards the chancel and said, "Aren't they comin' out any more?"

"Who? the boys? No, not this morning; there will be service again to-night."

"I'm comin'; I 'ain't seen nothin' so nice for ever so long. My! but they did sing nice; it just give me the shivers."

The young lady looked at him kindly. "You must be fond of music? Do you sing yourself?"

Hi looked doubtful. "I guess I ain't much on singin',—not that kind," he said, nodding his head towards the chancel. I can sing 'Annie Laurie,' and 'Massa's in the cold, cold ground,'—me an' Bill can sing that just famous."

His new friend laughed and moved towards the door. "Well, I practise here with the boys

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every Saturday evening, and if you would like to come, you can be here next Saturday and I will try what you can do. Good-by." Hi stared after her, only dimly comprehending the prospect so suddenly opened, and then half ran all the way home.

The Whitestone family were at dinner when he arrived, and his brother greeted his breathless entrance with,—

"You seem to be in a hurry to get away from your church-goin', youngster; religion don't seem to agree with you."

"Oh, Bill, I've just had the splendiferous time, and the boys were dressed in white like angels, an' Giglamps was there, an' she spoke to me, an' I can go on Saturday evening an' mebbe she'll let me sing." His eyes danced, and he sat down in his excitement and upset a glass of water that was standing by his plate.

"Just throw a little of that water on your head, Hi, and cool off and get the tangle out of what you have to say. Who's she? and what are you goin' to sing?"

But Hi was too full of what he had heard and seen. "I never was in that kind of a meetin' before, Jane," he said, turning to his more responsive sister-in-law; "they got up an' down an' did all kinds of things,—but Giglamps did

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pray beautiful, and he thought o' me an' how I tramped all alone from Washington County, an' said as how he wanted the Lord to take care of them that travelled by land an' water. He just prayed for lots of things, and for them as is orphans an' little children,—I tell you he just thought of everything. An' Bill, there was the candles there, sure enough, but I didn't see the millinery. I guess he keeps that in the box with the red cover, the thing the candles was on."

"But what about the singing and the lady, Hi?" asked Jane.

"Why, you see, I was waitin' for 'em to come out again. I thought mebbe they lived there, or somethin'; an' then the young lady, the one that plays the organ, she stops an' speaks to me an' asks me if I can sing. An' she told me for to come next Saturday night, an' she'll try what I can do."

Bill leaned back in his chair and laughed till he was in danger of apoplexy.

"Well, you are agoin' it, Hi. Giglamps and millinery and the whole outfit afore you've been here a week. Blest if I don't think I see you already, with a bald head and a pair of specs, and a lightin' of candles and snuffin' 'em," and Bill roared again.

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Hi looked at him doubtfully for a moment and his eyes filled with tears. "Let the child alone, Bill," said Jane warmly, and she put an extra lump of sugar into the cup of tea she was making for him. "If he likes the 'Piscopal church, why shouldn't he go there? Wasn't you sayin' this mornin' that you didn't take a hand in no one's religion?"

Thus reminded of his liberal tendencies, Bill sobered at once, and, reaching over, patted Hi upon the shoulder.

"All right, my lad. What I says I stick to: you shall go there just as often as you please; and if you wants to join 'em and like that sort of thing, why Bill Whitestone ain't agoin' to say you nay."

And so it was settled.

IV

IT was early morning at Mrs. Brown's of Penn Street. A drizzling rain was falling through mixed smoke and fog, and the brick pavements were covered with black, slimy mud, which stuck to the feet like glue. A miserable, dark, November morning, with the air heavy and blanket-like upon the lungs, and making a man breathe out fog at every breath to add to the mist, which the wet streets, and even the

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houses, seemed to send up wet and clammy from every pore.

The Reverend Erasmus had not been long in bed. He had spent the night in a wretched tenement in one of the alleys of the South Side, watching by a friendless, dying woman. Not that such a service was anything unusual in his simple-hearted way. "The most exasperatinest man" Mrs. Brown had declared, "that I ever seen in all my born days." And perhaps, if those who passed his odd figure on the street had seen him at such times, and had known how often his slender purse was opened to some uncared-for human need, they would not have wondered at his oddness. And could they have looked into his scantily-furnished room and have seen him measuring out his scanty store of sugar or of coal, they might have read his simple secret and have loved the lonely man who shyly passed them on some unknown mission of his own.

He had returned home while the gas-lights were still dull-yellow specks in the fog, without any apparent support to keep them in their places, and had undressed and thrown himself on his bed, and was soon fast asleep. He did not sleep very long, and was dreaming of being tied to a railroad track while an engine was thundering towards him, when he became con-

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scious that some one was knocking violently on his door. He rose up in bed and answered, and the voice of Mrs. Brown replied,—

“Why, I thought you must be dead and gone to kingdom come, Mr. Burton. I’ve been knocking for the last half hour. Here’s been a man to see you, and says it’s something special, and can’t wait.”

“Very well, Mrs. Brown. Send him upstairs and tell him to come in.” He sat up in bed, “a queer-looking chap,” as Hi had once said of him, but queerer now when his bald head and straggling side-locks had only a night-shirt below and a background of bed-post and crumpled pillow; but he received his visitor with as much equanimity as if this mode of reception was indorsed by the “best society.”

“Sit down, Michael, and tell me what you have come for.”

The visitor—an old man, who had seen hard work in his time, but who had gotten a leg crushed in an iron-mill, and who now eked out a living by acting as sexton of St. Margaret’s—hobbled in with his wooden leg and sat down in the chair pointed out to him. He had a large, round face, with gray whiskers, which met under his chin, and small round eyes, which seemed preternaturally open for lack of any eyebrows

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above them. He put his hands on his knees and bent forward with the air of a man who brings tidings.

“We bring you bad news, your reverence.” He always spoke of himself and his leg as “we,” as if they were two independent individuals who had agreed to go through life together.

“We found it out this morning, and we stumped down here to tell you.”

“What news? Found out what?”

“Why, the robbery, your reverence. The church has been robbed!” And the old man’s eyes stuck out in his eagerness. “You know the safe, stuck in the wall in the vestry, with the iron door, what we kept the communion things in? Well, sir, it’s been robbed, bust open, and every blessed thing gone!”

Erasmus passed his hand over his head to make sure that this was not another dream. “Gone?”

“Gone, your reverence, clean robbed, and every drawer and box in the room smashed to thunder.” Michael got up in his excitement and brought in the emphasis with his wooden leg pounding on the floor. “There has never been the like heard of in a Christian land as this here attackin’ of the Lord’s anointed. We

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have stood in Charing Cross, your reverence, where the blessed martyr, Charles the First, was murdered by them forsaken Puritans, and we've shook our fist at Whitehall prison ; but we never seen such sackerlege and despisin' of religion as this here afore in all our life."

"This is very sad," said Erasmus, wearily. "We must set the officers on the track and try to discover the perpetrators. I will go right away and attend to it, Michael. You did well in coming to tell me."

The sexton hobbled to the door. "Traitors you may well call 'em, sir ; and we hope to see 'em drawn and quartered for this blazin' business, savin' your reverence's presence ; and we'll lay our head again a punkin if some of them pawnbrokers don't know something about it afore night."

The irate leg and its companion thumped their way down stairs, and the rector rose and dressed himself and went out after them.

He thought of going to the mayor's office and lodging information, and as he turned towards Smithfield Street his eyes were arrested by the sign in the window which he had so often passed before, "Smit, the Pawnbroker." The old card was gone, and the new sign told that the actual occupant had taken possession. He

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stopped outside the window and looked absently at the rows of watches and the gilt chains and the revolvers of all sizes which were temptingly displayed within. Had not Michael said something about pawnbrokers? and perhaps the thieves would try to dispose of their plunder in some such way. He hesitated for a minute, and then opened the door and went in. Once inside he was at a loss how to open the subject. He must not cast a suspicion on innocent people, nor wound the feelings of the good man who owned the shop. He was not at home now as he had been during the long watch of the night before, and his shyness and timidity had come back to him.

There was some one sitting behind the counter, but he did not look to see who it might be. He had a feeling as he stood there as if he were somehow implicated in the robbery himself, and, going up to the counter, he said, hesitatingly,—

“There has been a robbery—in a church—and—the altar vessels have been stolen, and—I thought if you knew, or——”

“Do you take us for thieves, sir?”

If he had been taken for a thief himself and shot between the eyes he would not have been more startled.

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A girl of about twenty was standing up and looking at him. A complexion of clear olive, through which the red flushed angrily; black hair, in wavy tangles on her forehead and falling in rich profusion on her neck and shoulders; her lips red and slightly parted, and black eyes that were lighted now in sudden anger. Her slight, but full and well-made, figure was in a dress of pale blue, and a soft white kerchief in full folds was around her neck and crossed gracefully on her bosom.

“Do you take us for thieves, sir?” The tones were clear and musical, and a tremor of indignant surprise ran through them.

The Reverend Erasmus could not answer. If his Madonna had come down out of her picture-frame on his wall and had asked him the same question he would not have been more surprised. He felt the blood run to his face, and at length he stammered,—

“I—I did not mean—— I only thought——” And the spectacled eyes glanced helplessly at the girl before him.

It was impossible not to smile, and a smile broke over her face as she replied, more gently, “I do not understand you, sir. I know nothing of the matter of which you speak; you have made some mistake about it.”

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She was looking kindly at him now, and he backed his way towards the door confusedly.

“Yes, yes; it was a mistake. I—I beg your pardon.” And he felt around for the knob and got out of the door and into the street, conscious that those dark eyes were following him and still smiling.

All the way to the church they followed him. They were with him as he examined the vestry-room and looked in vain for a clue among the broken drawers and boxes and torn papers which littered the floor. They were with him all day, as, after setting the officers on the track, he went on his sick calls and attended to his various duties. Go where he would and do what he might, they were still with him and looking in at him, with a shadowy outline of blue and of soft white muslin on invisible shoulders below him, and always smiling.

When he reached his room that night they were following him still. He took down one of the “Lives of the Fathers” from his scanty shelves and tried to read; but the dark eyes kept looking up at him from every page, and the dark, heavy hair would come between him and his book and blur the words with its rich tangles. He closed the book at last and pushed it from him; for the last fifteen minutes he had

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not consciously read a word. He glanced up mechanically, and his eyes fell on St. Sebastian on the wall, pierced with arrows. It was horribly literal, and somehow he did not find it a pleasant object just now. Then his eyes wandered to the Sistine Madonna with the child in her arms, and the dark eyes of the morning were there again. She, too (he thought to himself), she, the Madonna, had been a Jewess, and must have been once a young girl, a daughter of Israel, with the same soft light in her eyes and the same smile about her lips—and—

This would never do. He got up with a strange trembling on him. It was a new experience, and he did not understand what had come over him. Women, to him, had been abstract beings, sisters of humanity who only touched the outermost circle of his life: the "Lives of the Fathers" had taught him to think of them as creatures once fair and beautiful, but who had lost their first estate through sin and had brought all evil into the world, and now were atoning for that grievous fault and winning back their way to Paradise by suffering and by deeds of charity and alms. But this abstract being, whose soul he had been trying to help regain lost joys, had suddenly appeared in flesh and blood and warm beauty,—and, strangely

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enough, no thought of saving her soul had once occurred to him. She had broken through into the innermost circle of his thoughts, and the dead "Fathers" had been utterly vanquished and put to rout by the dark, living eyes which looked up out of their words and belied them with a living loveliness. His lonely life had never known such a visitor before, and he was frightened at the strangeness of this unknown and unexpected coming. There she was with the fair cheek and the dark eyes and the soft, white folds that were crossed upon her bosom ; she did not seem to be outside him but to have become a part of himself, living inside of his consciousness and not to be torn away. He could hear her speak, and the tones of her voice came back to him and repeated themselves over and over.

Why did she come back to him ? What did it mean that he could not think of anything else to-night ? He walked up and down, up and down the little room ; and Mrs. Brown, down-stairs, put out the light at last and went to bed, with some misgiving as to the sanity of her lodger, whose tireless walking to and fro had never before disturbed the silence of the house in Penn Street.

By a curious coincidence the fates had ruled

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that the object of his thoughts should also be thinking of him. For a little while after he had gone, a smile at his odd appearance and at the remembrance of his confusion would flit across her face as she went on with the crocheting which his coming had interrupted; but she had forgotten all about him, until the evening brought him suddenly to her mind. She had come into the shop to look for a crochet-needle which she had dropped or mislaid, when she was attracted by the shuffling manner of a customer with whom her father was dealing. He had a slouch hat drawn down low over his eyes, and the eyes and every movement of the man betrayed an alert watchfulness. He had laid a small and worn morocco-covered box on the counter and had his hand still on it as the pawn-broker was speaking. "No, sir, we never touch anything of the kind. We deal only with private customers, and must have a guarantee with every sale." The fellow shuffled again uneasily, and was drawing the little box towards him, when the girl made a swift step forward and took it from his hand and looked at the silver plate upon the cover. She had only time to read the words upon the plate—"St. Margaret's Church. From Rev. Erasmus Burton"—when the man hastily seized it from her and

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went quickly through the door. Another man, who had been lounging against the window and peering in, joined him as he came out and the two went rapidly around the corner. In another instant the door had closed again behind the girl flying impetuously after them. But the god of thievery seemed against her; as she turned the sharp corner of the building she ran against a boy coming as rapidly in the opposite direction. The shock knocked the breath out of her for a moment, and she could only point after the men and gasp, "They robbed St. Margaret's." The words seemed to act like magic on the dazed faculties of the boy, and he was across the street and after them before she could speak again. They went up Sixth Avenue and turned into Bedford Street, going on a half run and carrying what looked like a heavy basket between them. The pursuer gained fast upon them, and, hearing the rapid footsteps behind them, they turned down a dark court into one of the worst quarters of the city; it was a sudden move on the part of one of them and took the other unprepared, and as they turned from the street one of the men slipped and fell and almost dragged down the other with him. They got up again with mutual curses, and when the boy reached the spot where they had fallen, they

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were nowhere to be seen. He stood still, and for the first time realized his danger. The light from the gas-lamps was none too brilliant on the street where he was standing, and the court below looked dark and dismal. The passers-by were few and far between on this lower end of the street; and the boy was feeling a creeping sensation along the spine, when a gleam of something shining caught his eye, and he stooped and picked up the little, black, morocco box which held the private communion service of St. Margaret's.

He hugged it close under his arm and started down the hill, looking often behind him as he walked and ran, and talking half aloud to himself in his eagerness. When he reached Smithfield Street he stopped, in doubt as to his next proceeding, and then hastily went on and stopped again by the window where his evening adventure had had such an unexpected beginning. He looked inside, and seeing an old man behind the counter, opened the door and walked in.

“I want to see the young lady.”

The old man looked up. “Eh? What is it?”

“I want to see the young lady, her with the black hair, as most knocked me down.”

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The man gazed at him curiously for a minute, and then opened an inner door and called,—

“Rebecca! daughter! Here is some one to see you.”

Two voices, one of them the clear tenor of a man singing a duet in a room near by, stopped suddenly at the call; and in a moment more the girl entered. She came in with the quick, firm step, and independent carrying of the head which seemed habitual with her, and the boy held out the box with triumph in his eyes.

“I got it, miss; they was too sharp for me an’ got away, but they fell down an’ dropped this much anyway, an’ I thought I’d come an’ tell you, bein’ as you had the rights to it, you know.”

She took the box into her hands, and opened it to make sure that its contents had not been disturbed, and looked at him with a pleasant smile. “You are a bright, good boy,” she said. “Yes, you were right in coming back to me. I wanted to know all about it, and the gentleman who had lost it was here to-day. Now, do you know where to take it?”

“Know? Me? Well, I rather think I do. I was hurryin’ to him when you ran into me. I’m a choir-boy at his church,—Hi Whitestone is my name.”

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“And you will take it safe to him?”

“Yes’m,” he said, brightly,—“safe’s a bank.”

She put her hand under his chin and lifted his face and looked into it. “Yes,” she said, slowly, “I think you will. But,” as a sudden thought crossed her, “no,—leave it with me to-night, and come for it to-morrow. You won’t mind leaving it with me?”

“Not a bit,” he replied, promptly, and put out his hand. “Good-night, miss; I’ll come for it to-morrow. He’ll be awful glad to get it.”

She opened the box again when he had gone and curiously examined the little vessels. “They have such strange ways, these Christians,” she said to herself, as she carefully replaced them in their velvet fastenings.

“What will you do with it, Rebecca?” Her father had been looking on, and now interrupted her meditations.

“Send it back to him to-morrow,” she said, with a laugh, as the occurrence of the morning again crossed her mind. “I frightened him so badly that I owe him some amends, and this will be my peace offering.” She held it out in mocking seriousness as if delivering it then and there, and left the room, still laughing gayly.

Hi had a great story to tell the family of Whitestones that night. The adventure lost

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nothing in his way of telling it: "an' Bill, she was just the handsomest young lady you ever seen, and her way of speakin' is just lovely! My, she'd have made a beautiful chorister,—if she'd only been a boy!"

V

AT ten o'clock next morning the Reverend Erasmus was sitting before his little table with his eyes fixed on a certain morocco box which lay there, with the lid open and thrown back on the little hinges. It had been left at the door early in the morning by a little boy,—so Mrs. Brown had told him,—with directions to give it to him when he was up. And now he had gotten it, and for the last half-hour had been sitting just so and looking at it. But there was nothing about the box itself, nor in the tiny paten and chalice of silver within it, to draw his eyes to objects so familiar: they were fixed upon a little piece of paper, cut square to fit inside, and laid upon the chalice and paten so as to be seen when the box was opened. The little square contained a few lines written in a clear, but distinct feminine hand:

"DEAR SIR:

"A happy accident has led to the recovery of a part of your property. It is due much more to

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one of your choristers than to me, but I have reserved to myself the pleasure of returning it, as part atonement for what I fear was my rudeness to you yesterday.

“ REBECCA.”

He read it over so often that he knew it by heart. “It was so kind of her,” he thought, “so good and thoughtful; and what a brute he had been to speak to her in that rough way!” He imagined himself as having gone in roughly and violently accusing her of the robbery, and yet she had smiled at him in answer, and how like an angel she now covered his rudeness by so kindly taking all the blame. “Yes,” he said to himself, “like an angel.” And then he put the box to one side of the table, taking it up very gently and carefully, as if a new value had come upon it, and took out some writing-paper with the thought that he must send a reply. But he could not frame one to his mind. He began a dozen different epistles,—“Dear Miss,”—“Dear Madam,”—“Dear Miss Rebecca,”—that looked too familiar. He tore up the whole half-dozen, not getting any further than these helpless openings, and having no clear idea of what he wanted to say. The fair face that he had seen but that one time and which was glorified by the halo which

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his own thoughts had thrown around it was still vividly present to him ; the piece of paper which her hands had touched, the words which she had really written, it was all like a rosy cloud upon his brain,—and he pushed his paper and pen away.

How long it seemed since yesterday : could it be only one day, in which he had seemed to have lived a lifetime already ? Yes, only one day ; and there was work to be done in the day now before him. He got up and put on his hat, and stopped before the little looking-glass on the wall. It was not a very reputable hat which he saw there : it was worn and weather-stained, and had an ugly dent in front. He took it off and brushed it, and put it on again with the dent behind : it did not fit so well, but it looked better. “I must really get another hat,” he said to himself ; “I had no idea it was so shabby ; and my coat is looking rusty, too. It won’t do to look so poorly before the people of St. Margaret’s,—they might be ashamed of me.” He looked at himself wistfully again, and then took up the little piece of paper and folded it carefully and put it in the inside pocket of his coat,—putting his hand in twice afterwards to make sure that it was actually there and had not slipped outside it,—then went down the stairs and out upon his way. As he turned from

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Liberty Street into Smithfield he tried to look unconcernedly into the plate-glass window. The look in itself was a dismal failure, and would have been wasted at the best, for there was no one there; but for the rest of his walk there was a new and curious air of independence about the "priest-in-charge" of St. Margaret's, as if there was some new dignity to be supported and people would expect him to hold his own.

It seemed as if some one was always sick in that South Side parish. Just now it was diphtheria which was raging, and in this year of grace 18— it was claiming more victims than the yellow fever had claimed at Memphis in the fatal summer of the year before. Scores of tenements had been built on land made of the cinders of the mills and furnaces, and porous as a sponge. The streets were dirty and neglected, the alleys reeking with foul smells, the people for the most part ignorant of the simplest rules of sanitary science. A broad invitation to the law of disease to come freely and work its will could not have been more plainly and urgently given than it was given on every hand. And the law of disease did its business unerringly. The doctors were worked to the limit of endurance; old and young fell alike before the scourge, and black or white crape on the doors

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of the crowded, ill-kept houses was so common a sight that a new draping on door-knob or door-bell hardly caused remark from passers-by. People seemed to have accepted it as the natural and necessary condition of affairs,—a part of the “eternal fitness of things.” There was an apathy about it that was more awful than the fell disease. Day after day Erasmus had worked among his stricken people, had prayed with them and watched them and tended them, and it was into one of the houses with white crape on the door that he now entered. He could hardly get into the room, which opened from the street, so crowded was it with women, and he saw with alarm that several had their children in their arms. A little white coffin was in the centre of the room, and seated on chairs near it were the father and mother, with their children of various ages clustered around them and crying. The air was close and heavy, and the windows were shut tight, with the curtains down. A little light came through into the room from the hall behind, and by that light the rector read the solemn service, standing at the coffin’s head. It was a common scene, sad because so common, and there was nothing to call for a special word. But when the service was over and he

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saw the women coming forward and holding down their children that the little ones might kiss the lips of the dead child, he spoke sharply and sternly, "Do you want to kill your children? Don't you know better than to have them here at all, without making them take death on their lips from a dead child?"

They looked at him, frightened at first, and then indignantly, as if he were lacking in the common feelings of humanity, and muttered to each other as they went away. Then he moved back into the hall behind him, and feeling a touch upon his arm turned questioningly.

"I thought I'd see you here, sir. The undertaker who buried mother has been asking for his money, and I've tried hard for work and promised him the first I'd make; but he says he can't wait, sir. There's so many calls on him just now."

Erasmus took out his meagre pocket-book. "I haven't much, Jim." A momentary thought of the new hat came over him, and then he quietly emptied out his little treasure. "It will help you a little, and the man must wait for more."

"Thank you very much, sir. I'll pay it all back as soon as I get work. But things go against me, somehow."

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The rector looked again into the room. "It is hard times for them all, these days, Jim," he said.

"They're dying off fast, sir, and nobody seems to care. If it was horses that was dying on the South Side as fast as people, there would soon be a stir, and the whole city would be talking about it. But human souls don't seem to make no difference; they don't lose no money by them."

The pale face of the young man grew paler still as he was speaking, and there was a glow in his eyes which told of the smouldering fires below.

Erasmus was startled by the intensity of the tone and turned to look at him, but Jim had turned away and was moving through the crowd. But it started him thinking, and he was thinking of it still when the lid of the little coffin had been screwed down and one more procession had been added to the many gone before.

But the troubles of the day were not yet over. He had gotten back to his room after the long ride to and from the cemetery, and was at his frugal supper, prepared, as usual, by his own hands, when a double ring, as if the old bell had suddenly gone crazy, came at the door below. He listened expectantly, and was not surprised when he heard Mrs. Brown ascending the stairs and heavier footsteps following. He

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hastily put his supper away, and, in response to his "Come in," a stranger entered. He was a tall man, broad-shouldered and strong, with a frank, open face, and dressed in workman's clothes.

"I have come to see you, sir, about some-
thin' particular."

"Yes," said Erasmus, and he pointed to a chair. "Sit down, and I will do what I can for you."

"Thank you, sir, but I'll not sit down. I take it, you are the minister of St. Margaret's?"

"Yes, I am the minister." He waited for the next step to be taken, but the man stood uneasily, twisting his soft hat in his hands.

"Well, you see, sir, I'm not much in a religious way myself, not havin' a fancy that way, particular; but Hi says to me, 'You go and tell him, Bill,' says he, 'and he'll come.' I'm Hi's brother Bill, and he's been took with diptheery sudden, and——"

But Erasmus had already got his hat on, taking it hastily from the nail on which it hung, and careless now as to which side the dent might be.

"Come away, at once; we will take the cars and go faster."

They went out together, and in half an hour

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were at Bill Whitestone's door. As they came into the room the sick boy's eyes lighted up with pleasure. "I knew you'd come, sir," he said, faintly; and as the rector sat down by the bed and took the little hand in his, "my throat is very bad, sir. I'm afraid I can't be with the boys an' sing on Sunday."

"That's what he's been a-sayin' over and over," said Bill; "and you won't mind my not stayin'; it kind o' gives me a lump in the throat to hear him."

The Reverend Erasmus bent kindly over the sick lad and smoothed the hair from his forehead. "Never mind, my boy; you can sing in your heart, you know, and the Lord will hear you. And we will pray the Lord in his mercy to give you back to us, and—" The poor minister felt his own voice breaking, and he fell on his knees and put his face on the hand of the child which he was still holding. It had been a hard day for him, and he was very heart-sore now.

All through the night he watched by his little friend. Hi slept at intervals, starting uneasily in his sleep and moaning. Bill came twice to the door to hear how "little Hi" was doing, and Jane came several times into the room and wanted to share the vigil. But he put them

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gently away, and said that he could do it well alone and knew just what must be done. So they thanked him at last and said good-night, and left him with his little chorister.

And if in that long watch as the night wore away he thought of the event of the morning, who can blame him? And if he felt in that wide pocket and took out the note and read again what he knew so well already, who still can blame him?

And so the different lives which a little while before had been so far apart were drifting closer together.

VI

WHEN morning came, Hi was still tossing feverishly. The doctor again came and examined him, and in reply to anxious questions shook his head; he could promise nothing. Erasmus gave his place to Jane and lay down upon a lounge in the room below: he was more tired than he would have been willing to confess, and he was soon sleeping heavily.

At noon he was roused by Bill, who had come home to dinner and had just come from the sick-room: "Hi is askin' for you, sir." He got up and went upstairs." The boy's face lighted with a smile as he came in, and when he had taken his hand he drew him down to him and

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whispered, "Do you think she would come, sir, if I asked her? I've been dreamin' of her all night."

"Who is it, Hi? Whom shall I send for?"

The boy spoke with difficulty. "The young lady,—the one as sent the box." The rector of St. Margaret's looked at him in surprise and a strange feeling passed over him: "Yes, Hi; I will send for her, and perhaps she will come." The boy looked at him gratefully, and he went down-stairs and asked for pen and paper. There was no sign of hesitation this time as he dipped the pen in the ink:

"MISS REBECCA:

"The little boy whom you sent with the box and who has taken a great fancy to you, is very sick and wants to see you. If you can gratify him, please come with the bearer; but you should know in advance that the disease is diphtheria.

"Very truly yours,

"ERASMUS BURTON."

It was despatched by one of the little White-stones, and two hours passed away without reply. Would she come? Would she think it worth her while to gratify the wish of a sick

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child? or would she be afraid to risk herself with a disease so fatal? At every noise of footsteps on the street below the sick boy would lift his head and look eagerly towards the door; and at length the street-door opened and shut; there were voices on the stairs,—and then Rebecca had entered and was standing by the bed. She was dressed in black, with a deep white collar about her neck; a little Quaker-like bonnet, peaked in front and lined with pale rose-color, was on her head, and her hair was gathered in a heavy knot behind.

“I have come to see you, Hi,” she said, in her clear, soft tones; “they told me you wanted to see me.”

The boy’s eyes were fastened on her face. “Yes, miss. I took the box all right. The woman said she’d give it to him.” He turned his eyes towards the window as he spoke, and Rebecca turned her head to follow them. Erasmus was standing by the window. He had been picturing her to himself for those two hours, recalling her face as his memory had painted it on his mind; but she was lovelier to him than even he had thought her as she came in at the door; and her easy, graceful motion as she crossed the room, and the low, sweet voice and manner as she spoke to the sick boy,

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completed the infatuation which possessed him. She smiled a recognition as their eyes met, and she bowed slightly to him, while the blood rushed to his face and he made a half step forward, and stopped awkwardly. She did not seem to notice his confusion, and said, quietly, "I am much obliged to you for sending for me. I took a liking to the boy, and am glad to please him so easily."

He found his voice in time to answer her, looking at her very much as Hi had looked at her a moment before. "It was very good of you. He is a favorite of mine" (he felt as if a new and strong link were between them in her liking for his favorite chorister), "and—and I know he is glad to see you."

She smiled again; she was thinking how odd and quaint he looked, and wondered why he should be so shy and awkward. And then she sat down by the bed and took the sick child's hand in hers, as he had taken it in his before, and stroked it gently with the other, soothing him in soft, low tones. It was as if there was no other person there.

Hi kept his eyes upon her face until he gradually dropped asleep; and then she gently put his hand away and rose up quietly. The figure by the window had not moved; he had not lost

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her simplest action nor the faintest turning of the graceful head,—he would never forget that scene. But now, as she rose to go, his shyness came back to him, and the man who was not afraid of death and faced it calmly every day, felt himself trembling before this young girl. “I think I can go, now,” she said, dropping her voice to a whisper, “he seems to be sleeping soundly.”

“Yes,” he answered, with a sudden dryness in the throat which seemed to take away the power of utterance; “I will always remember your kindness.”

She made a little deprecating gesture,—“It was nothing. I’m glad I pleased the boy.”

He held the door open for her to pass through, and the rustle of her dress on the stairs made his heart beat faster,—he had never noticed the sound of any woman’s dress before. He heard her stop in the hall below and speak to Jane and say a pleasant word to the little ones, and he heard the hall-door close behind her; and when he went back into the room it seemed empty and lonely, and yet with a sacredness about it which no other room had ever had,—so strangely had one woman’s presence a power to change the world in which he lived.

At four o’clock the doctor came again, and

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this time spoke more hopefully. "He will pull through now, I think; he has taken a turn for the better." And they all thanked him and felt as if a great weight had been lifted all at once, and no news had ever come so welcome as those cheery words, and he had a physician's best reward in the light, grateful hearts he left behind him.

And Bill Whitestone must have the rector to stay to tea. "It ain't no use talkin'," he had said privately to Jane; "this minister has got the real stuff, and there ain't no back-down about him. He don't waste his time in talkin' pious to a fellow, but just puts on his hat and goes straight to business. You ask him to have supper before he goes." And so it happened that he staid; and Bill, who certainly had no half ways about him, shone at his best, and told stories of Hi and the farm, laughing uproariously at his own anecdotes, and once or twice rubbing his eyes across his sleeve as he told of Hi's devotion to himself, and thought of the pale, little face upstairs. And Jane smiled sympathetically, leaving her place at the table every little while to run up and see that Hi wanted nothing; and the young Whitestones acted as chorus and crowded enthusiastically at the stories of Hi's exploits.

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"Yes, sir," said Bill, "he was always a queer one. One time at school, the school-marm was askin' for deerivities of words or somethin': 'What is the deerivative of Man?' she says; and they all said, 'Manly.' 'And what is the deerivative of dog?' she says; and Hi, he speaks up bold and 'Pups,' he says; and, my sakes! how they all laughed,—and if they didn't call him 'Pups' for more'n a month afterwards."

The Whitestones junior fairly yelled at this, whereupon their father cuffed the ears of the one nearest him and wanted to know "if they was a-runnin' a circus, or what was they thinkin' of when Hi was sick up-stairs." They became unnaturally sober in an instant; but when the youngest gulped out "Pups" again under his breath, they got red in the face and choked and gurgled, keeping one eye on their paternal ancestor and watching his face for a signal to let go and save themselves from bursting. "Such carryin's on," said Bill, severely, proud of his attempts to entertain; "one'd think you was no better than little cannerbuls!" But Hi was to get well, and they were all infected with a desire to laugh about nothing, and there was a very merry tea-party in the glass-blower's home.

When Erasmus got away at last, the night was dark and overcast with heavy clouds. It

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was not easy to tell whether the banks of smoke were hanging more heavy than usual, or whether a storm was close at hand; but before he was half-way home the rain began to fall, and it was pouring steadily as he crossed the bridge to the main city. He had no umbrella, and being fairly wet before a street-car overtook him, he decided to plod on in the rain.

But it came down with a more persistent steadiness than he had counted on, and he was soaked through when he turned the corner of Smithfield Street towards the shelter awaiting him at Mrs. Brown's.

The light from the broad plate-glass windows at the corner was streaming out upon the wet pavement, and he stopped for a moment and looked in. He did not stop long. It was a pity that he stopped at all,—a pity that he should have seen the sight he saw there, that it might not have come to him in some easier and gentler way. Rebecca was standing in the middle of the floor, dressed as he had seen her in the afternoon, except that the Quakerish little bonnet had been laid aside. In front of her stood a young man, tall and straight, with dark hair and moustache, and bright, laughing eyes, holding a rose-bud in his hand. They were standing close together and a laughing banter was evidently going on

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between them, and Erasmus saw him lift his hand and place the rose-bud in the girl's hair.

A sickening of the heart came suddenly over him as he stood there in the rain, scarcely believing what he had seen ; and hardly knowing what he did, he turned away and hurried blindly homeward.

When he reached his room, he sat there, long and silently, staring at the wall, but seeing nothing consciously. It seemed so very long ago, miles and miles away, and ages since he had left the Whitestones house and walked so happily along. He felt in his pocket for the piece of paper he had carried with him so sacredly, and took it out and unfolded it. It was wet through, and the ink had run with the wet and blurred the writing, but he spread it out upon his knee ; and another hour passed away while he sat without moving, seeing nothing but the figure of the girl as he had seen her twice that day. Now she was sitting by the bed and holding Hi's little hand in hers, and he could hear her speaking to him in those low, sweet tones ; and the dark eyes would turn at last to where he stood by the window, and her face smiled pleasantly at seeing him again. Now she was standing in the light and laughing with a

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rose-bud in her hair, while he stood outside and far away from her.

He got up and knelt down by the bed and buried his face on his arms. He tried to pray, but no words would come ; he could only moan and repeat over and over again, as if he must say the words aloud to the silent room, "Oh, God, I love her—I love her!"

He knew it now ; he knew what it all meant ; the touch of another's hand upon her hair had shown him all, and the light of the windows streaming out upon the cold, wet pavement had been no clearer than the light which came in now upon his lonely life. How long he had remained there on his knees he did not know. When he got up at length, he shivered with the cold ; his wet clothes were still on him, but he had not thought of them, and had not cared.

But Mrs. Brown heard no uneasy footsteps walking overhead to-night, and only the policeman, as he went his rounds, wondered at the light from the window which was burning far into the morning.

VII

THERE was a stranger in the pulpit of St. Margaret's the next Sunday morning. Dr. Wyton, the busy, kindly rector of the wealthy

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church of St. Andrew, had answered a brief note of request from Erasmus by a hasty visit to his room: a nervous, active little man, of about fifty years of age, a sort of ecclesiastical engine at high pressure and as young in heart as he had been twenty-five years ago, "his eye not dimmed nor his natural force abated."

"Why, my good fellow, what does all this mean? You're not going to be sick, are you? Of course I'll take your service for you; I can get some one to fill my place, and I'll be glad to help you." (He had a way of opening his mouth around an emphatic word as if it was a big word and he wanted to get it all out at once, and it always seemed a very much larger word from his way of saying it.)

"Why don't you let us see more of you? Can't I do something for you now?"

Erasmus was in bed, and put out his hand to meet that of his visitor. "Nothing, thank you. I didn't want to trouble you about the service to-morrow, but I have taken cold and feel so weak——" a fit of coughing interrupted him, a deep cough that made his chest feel sore and ragged as if something had been torn inside.

"Trouble? My dear fellow, you musn't speak of it. You've had a doctor? What! no doctor? Then I'll send you one. No,"—as Eras-

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mus attempted to speak,—“no, I won’t have any nonsense; I’ll send him up at once. And I’ll attend to Sunday for you; make your mind easy and get well, that is all that you have to do.” He bustled out again, and the very chairs and tables seemed to have taken on a sprightly, business air, as if the energy and vitality of the warm-hearted visitor had entered into them: and so it happened that the people of St. Margaret’s had a strange minister on Sunday.

There was general surprise among the congregation,—and Bill Whitestone, who had come in at the last moment before the service began and had taken a seat by the door, was the most surprised of any. “This is what comes of goin’ to church,” he said, reproachfully, as he saw that Erasmus was not to be there. “Here I’ve been a-promisin’ Hi that I’d come just for once and havin’ took a likin’ to the minister, and this is all I get for it. Blamed if I ever come again; it’s disgustin’!”

But he felt differently as the service went on in the earnest tones of Dr. Wyton’s voice, and as memories of his mother in the old meeting-house at home came back to him. He thought that after all there might be something better in this than in loitering about the house on Sunday mornings, or in loitering about the mill-yard

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with a crowd of men as careless as himself and talking politics or strikes. He almost made up his mind to try it again some time; and when the service was over he joined a group which was waiting outside to hear news of their minister. Presently Michael, the sexton, came down the aisle, marking time with his wooden leg upon the floor and keeping it outside the strip of matting, as if he liked to hear the sound or wanted to be sure that his companion was along with him; and the group at the door gathered around him. "What's the word, Michael?"

"Rector's sick. That there," and he jerked out his wooden stump in the direction of the vestry-room, "is Dr. Wyton, come to take his place, and takes it well we say: we've heard a deal of preachin' in our time, and he preaches like a man what knows his business."

"He don't know no more about his business than the other one; and I don't want to hear no word again' him," growled a voice that sounded as if it came from Bill Whitestone.

Michael faced the new-comer with mingled astonishment and disgust. "Who's a-sayin' anything again' him, and wot d'you mean by such unnatural langwidge in a church as has been reglarly consercrated?"

"I ain't in no church," retorted the new con-

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vert, crunching his heel on the cinder walk to make sure of his actual position. "I ain't in no church, and I don't interfere with no man's religion, but if any man here says a word again' Giglamps I'll bust his head."

Even the wooden leg seemed to partake of the angry amazement which this irreverent outburst spread over the honest face of the sexton ; and it is to be feared that his religious character, as defender of the faith, would have suffered serious injury had not Dr. Wyton opportunely appeared at this moment. Bill put his hands in his pockets and walked away ; but feeling that he had taken quite a decided step and committed himself irrevocably to the cause of religion. "Spoke right out in meetin'," he said to Hi in the presence of Jane and the juniors ; "went clean over the line and offered to smash any fellow who had a word to say again' it!" And from that day he counted himself as belonging to St. Margaret's.

In more than one home that Sunday the talk turned sorrowfully to the absent minister. They had often joked about him among themselves, and had given him the name which Bill Whitestone seemed to accept as his recognized cognomen ; they had shaken their heads over what they called his "popish ways" in church,

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and some had even thought of making some sort of a public protest against them; but now, in the day of his trouble, they thought only of the lonely, patient figure who had gone in and out among them, and who had never spoken a harsh word, but had been always kind and faithful.

It is a pity that it comes so late, that it comes so often too late to be of any comfort or service to him that needs it.

Day after day passed by, but there was no change for the better in the room on Penn Street. The doctor came every day, but gave no sign of progress. "No constitution, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Brown, at the hall-door, as he pulled on his gloves; "no lungs worth mentioning, system all run down." And Mrs. Brown had answered, "It's only his religion that has kept him up so long. I always said he was a killing of himself for them saints of his, and no thanks to them either."

His brother clergy were there often to see him, and inquiries from the South Side parish were left every day at the door.

But Hi was most welcome of all. The boy had recovered rapidly, and the first day on which he could be out he was over to the sick man's room. Every day afterwards found him

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regularly at the door, and the minister would look for his coming, and listen for his steps on the stair, as Hi himself had watched for the coming of a woman's face and the rustle of a woman's dress on a certain afternoon not long ago, and Erasmus remembered it. He listened to the boy's prattle of things and doings in the world outside,—but it was all a "world outside" to him now. He knew that he was growing weaker; that the light was burning lower every day; and he was thankful that it was so, and he knew in his heart that he was glad to go. "It never could be," he said quietly to himself, "even if I lived, it could never be,—it would always be a weariness and a pain."

He was thinking this over and over, lying very quiet with his eyes closed, when Hi spoke to him again. "Do you remember that day on the bridge, sir?"

"Yes, Hi," he smiled, faintly; he had always liked to hear the bright, eager voice of the young boy.

"I remember it. My! I couldn't ever forget that, you know; I was so all out and lost-like. An' Bill, he laughed at you; but he don't laugh any more; he says you're the right kind after all, an' he's goin' to stand by you. I tell you, 'tain't every one that Bill would say that for."

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“Yes, Hi.” He had turned his head to see the boy’s face better. Hi was sitting on a chair, with his feet on the rung and his knees drawn up in front of him, and the rector’s old, rusty coat hanging on the back of it, as it had been thrown there the night he had come home in the rain.

“I didn’t know then that I was goin’ to know you an’ be one of your boys in the choir; but we never do seem to know how things are goin’ to turn out, and what’ll happen just from meeting people, do we?”

The rector did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon the face of the boy, who rattled innocently on,—

“But it all comes out right at last, somehow; an’ then we see it’s all for the best, an’ that, mebbe, it was meant to be just that way. That’s what Jane says when things go wrong; an’ Bill he says that Jane has most always got the rights of it. ‘All for the best;’ yes, all for the best.”

It was getting late, for Hi had always made his visits after working-hours.

“You must go now, my boy, my dear boy.” And Hi came near and took the thin hand held out to him. “You can come again to-morrow.” He held the boy’s hand in his as if he did not want to let it go. “You have been a great

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comfort to me, and you will not forget me, I know. And you will grow up, Hi, and be the rector of St. Margaret's some day, and you will do better work for those poor souls than I could ever do. But I've tried, I did try, to help them."

The little chorister bent over and kissed him, and went softly away.

And the light outside grew fainter until the windows were a dim blur, and the noises on the street grew less and less until they died away. Mrs. Brown stole gently in, shading a lighted candle with her hand, and, seeing him sleeping quietly, went away, with hopes of a change for the better by morning, and planning some new surprise in the way of cookery to tempt him to increase his strength.

It grew darker and quieter, until the various objects in the room had lost all outlines and faded into one unbroken shadow, and a little mouse nibbling at stray crumbs upon the floor would stop, frightened at its own work, which seemed a loud noise in the stillness.

And the light outside came back with the morning, making the windows blurred patches of white again, and deepening till it showed the two plain chairs with the clothes hanging limp over the backs of them, and the table, and the

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three pictures on the wall, till it crossed the room and fell upon the bed, and showed the still figure lying there so quietly.

But the light inside had ceased to shine, and the face was very white and calm and gentle in its stillness; the hands were folded one upon the other, and the heart, which had only known kindness and gentleness and charity for all would never be weary or pained again.

The Reverend Erasmus was dead!

Simon Smith

HOW the wind did howl! It swept down through the gulch at the head of Clear Creek Cañon, and shook the little rectory as if some gigantic beast were shaking it in his jaws, and drove the rain against the windows like handfuls of sand dashed against the panes. A regular March storm in the Colorado mountains.

It was Saturday night, and the rector was sitting in his study, writing notes for the sermon he was to preach next day. He was not making much headway. He had been too busy all week to give much mind to it, and he had only come back an hour ago from a miner's cabin on the Divide, where old Trevarthen's little granddaughter was dying of mountain fever. He couldn't get the child out of his mind. He thought of his own little daughter, lying asleep in the next room, and his heart went out in pity to the stricken home from which the only little child was going away.

He had written his text,—“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for

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his friend,"—and he had put down a few headings under it. But his mind wouldn't work: he was back again in the miner's home, with the storm beating against it, and the little life that was passing away so still and quiet among it all.

The opening of the study-door startled him. And as he turned his head he thought, "Another summons to go out: my sermon is done for."

A man about forty years of age was standing in the open door. His red hair and rough red beard were dripping wet, his coarse gray woollen shirt and corduroy breeches stuck into his heavy boots were soaked through, and water ran in a little stream from the slouch hat which he held awkwardly in his hand. "Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but no one could hear me knockin', for the storm."

"What is the matter? Anybody sick?" People said that the Rev. Mr. Gordon had a quick, straight way of going at things.

"Nobody that I know of," was the answer, given hesitatingly; "I come about myself, thinkin' ye might help me—some way."

"Help you?"

"Leastways, thinkin' as how ye might tell a pardner what to do."

The rector laid down the pen which he had

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been holding. "Sit down,—never mind being wet, it won't hurt anything,—and tell me who you are and what you mean."

"Thank ye, but I'd as lief stand. Ye don't know me; I'm a stranger in these parts. My name is—is Simon." He glanced furtively about the room. "Yes, that's it, Simon,—Simon Smith. An' I've tramped in, cl'ar from Arizony, an' I'm dead broke, an' got no place to sleep, an' 'ain't had nothin' to eat since yesterday."

Mr. Gordon glanced at him sharply. "How did you happen to come to me?"

"Well, pardner, to strike a straight trail, I foller'd ye. I was comin' over the Divide, an' there was a light in a cabin up there, an' I went to the winder an' peeked in, an' saw ye prayin'. I knew ye was a minister, an' I foller'd ye home; an' I walked up an' down a bit, tryin' to get heart up; an' then I come in." He shivered, as if with cold, and smiled faintly. "I reckon the wet has soaked inter me."

Gordon got up. "Come into the kitchen, and I'll get you something to eat. My wife has gone to bed, but I can find you something."

He put the remains of a turkey and half a loaf of bread upon the table, and stood near,

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watching the man, who ate ravenously of what was set before him. The carcase of the turkey had become bare bone and the legs were stripped even to the sinews, and nothing but the end crust was left of the bread, when the man stopped and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "It's the first square meal I've had for a week. I'm obleeged to ye, pardner."

"That's all right. Now, where are you going to sleep?"

Simon Smith pushed back his chair and took up his soaked hat. "I'll find a shed somewhere. I'm used to it; an' I feel good now."

Gordon's forehead puckered a moment, and then cleared. "I'll put you in the attic; there's a cot there. Come with me; and go easy, so as not to wake my little girl."

He showed the man to the room under the roof, put the lamp on the floor, and went out. In a few minutes he returned with some things on his arm: "Here's a dry undershirt and a night-shirt for you, and a towel to rub yourself down with. If you hear any queer noise overhead, don't mind it: the roof runs back into the hill, and the goats get on it sometimes. Good-night."

Simon did not make any reply. He opened

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his mouth once or twice as if to speak, but Gordon had gone before the attempt materialized.

The sermon seemed to have got into the same voiceless condition. The rector took up his pen again, but the train of thought had been broken a second time, and he could not find the way to join it. The hour was close to midnight. At last he gave it up, went to a drawer, and drew out a bundle of sermons preached several years before. He selected one that, as he said to himself, would "have to do." And then he went to bed.

"There's a man asleep in the attic," he announced to his wife as breakfast was over. "He came in late last night and had no place to sleep, and I couldn't send him out into the storm. You are surprised?"

"I've been married to you seven years," his wife calmly replied, "and I'm not surprised at anything. I suppose the man has scarlet fever, or something equally contagious?"

"No," said Gordon, laughingly; "he hadn't anything but the wettest shirt and trousers I ever saw. There's an old suit of mine in the closet, and I wish you'd give them to him, and put his in the kitchen to dry. He'll come down

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when he has had his sleep out; and I must be off now." He kissed his wife,—it was a way of his never to leave the house without it,—and went up to the church, where he had a Bible-class at an early hour.

When the regular morning service was over he joined his wife at the church-door, and she had further news of their guest.

"I gave him your old suit, as you told me to do. He is a rough-looking specimen, and he has an astonishing appetite. He wanted a pair of scissors and a razor, and I gave him them, too."

"You don't mean that he finished his breakfast by swallowing cutlery?"

"Not while I was present. I don't know what he wanted them for; but I knew what you'd do if you were there; so I handed over my scissors and your razor."

"My razor! Well, yes: I'd do anything in reason, I suppose; but I draw the line at a man's pet razor."

The explanation of the double request was before him as he entered the study. Simon Smith was sitting there, and six-year old Dorothy was on his knee and apparently giving him the history of a doll which he was holding. At least it should have been Simon; but the

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red beard and whiskers and moustache were gone, and the bushy red hair had only the roughly-cut and close-cropped spikes of itself left upon his head. The change in his appearance, aided by the change of clothes, was so great that Gordon under any other circumstances would not have known him as the same man. He stared at him in surprise.

“What have you been doing to yourself?”

Simon put the child down, and passed his hand over his head. “I’ve been reddin’ up a bit. When I got these clothes o’ yours on, for which I’m obligeed to ye, the lookin'-glass made my head look like a miner’s dump: they didn’t match worth a cent; an’ I cleared it off some.”

“I should say you had: it looks as if it had been cleared off with a saw.” He took the big easy-chair at the other side of the fire and looked across at him. “I didn’t care to ask you any questions last night. Are you looking for work? Will you work here in the mines?”

“I’m lookin’ for work, sure enough; but—but I don’t think I’m jest fit for it yet. I’m naterally strong, but I’ve been jest skinnin’ along for a while back, an’ I’m rattled a bit. If ye could give me somethin’ to do, yerself, till I——?”

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Gordon was looking at him steadily, without reply.

"I see ye 'ain't got no girl in the kitchen ; an' I could make myself handy about a house." There was a wistfulness in his eyes that reminded Gordon of the dumb entreaty of a dog he used to have. "I'd do anythin' I could ; an' I'd thank ye kindly for it."

Gordon pondered. "You never did anything about a church?"

"Well, no ; I 'ain't been much in a religious way,—not since I came into the mining country." He leaned forward with his hands upon his knees. "But if ye'd tell me the sort o' religion ye'd want, I'd try to make a fist at it."

The rector smiled. "I don't mean in that way. But there are all sorts of jobs to do about a church,—light fires, keep it clean, go on errands, look after things generally. We have no regular sexton ; and if you think——"

"I'll do it for ye," interrupted Simon, eagerly ; "I'll keep it all straight, an' help round the house all I kin. Jest give me the kitchen to eat in, an' the attic to sleep in, an' I'll do square by ye. Will ye do it?"

"Yes, I'll do it. You had better keep the clothes you have on : you will look more like a sexton. We'll see how it works."

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It seemed to work well. In that gold-mining region, where new people came and went, and new "finds" and excitements were things of every day, and new faces as plenty as old ones, nobody asked or cared where the new sexton had come from. He did his work quietly and thoroughly, and was as good as his word in being handy about the house. Little Dorothy took a special liking to him, and he never tired of playing with her and inventing things for her amusement. "Mr. Gordon sets a heap by her," he said, in reply to a laughing remonstrance of Gordon's wife. "He shets me up when I go for to tell him that I'm not forgettin' the night o' the storm, but he can't hinder me lovin' his child."

It was Gordon's way to let such incidents as that of the storm pass from his mind. He lived a busy life, and was too much occupied with the present to keep a mental diary of things which, after all, he counted as too slight and simple to be worth thinking of. "It was a very little thing to do," he had said, rather shortly, on the occasion which Simon had referred to as shettin' him up. "You'd have done the same for me; anybody would. It's what we're put into this world for." And it practically passed into forgetfulness.

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But within one month after that March night it came sharply back to him. He was standing in the post-office, waiting for the box-window to be opened for the delivery of the mail which the stage had just brought in. A crowd of men was in the room, and chance sentences of what seemed to be a common subject of talk came to his ear. "I'll bet five to one they'll catch him :" "Clear case of murder :" "Safe through the mountain passes by this time :" "Shot down on his claim."

He asked a man near him what it meant. The man pointed to a printed notice which had been freshly put upon the wall close by. Gordon turned and read it.

\$500 REWARD!

The above Reward will be paid for information leading to the arrest of "Missouri Pete," charged with the murder of James Thorpe, of California Gulch, on the 16th of March. He is about 5 ft. 10 inches in height, with red hair and red beard, and at the time of the murder wore a gray woollen shirt and corduroy trousers, etc., etc.

He read it over twice, as if he could not quite get the meaning of it into his mind ; and as he read it the second time, he was conscious of seeing, like a vision in the brain, a man holding his little Dorothy on his knee.

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A voice at his side broke in on him. "I knowed him. I was down in South Park an' worked in the Gulch a spell. He was a simple-minded chap, and didn't seem to have no harm in him; but you can't tell what a man 'll do when his blood's up. Thorpe an' him had some fuss about a claim."

He turned to the speaker. "What will be done if they arrest him?"

"Hang him, sure: there's been a lot of trouble down there, and the Vigilantes have sworn to string up the next man they catch at it. I wouldn't give a nickel for his chance if they get their hands on him."

Gordon did not wait for the mail to be distributed. He pushed his way through the crowd, and went slowly down the road to his home.

He found Simon in the kitchen, paring potatoes for dinner. Saying briefly that he wanted to speak with him, he led the way into the study.

"Sit down." Gordon's voice was grave and troubled, and each sentence was marked by a pause. "You came here one night a month ago. I want you to tell me the truth. Is your real name 'Simon'?"

The eyes of the man sitting opposite reflected

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the troubled look which met his. "No, it ain't. I lied to ye."

"You said that you had tramped in from Arizona?"

"I hadn't. I come from Californy Gulch; an' I lied to ye again."

"Is it all a lie?"

The man called Simon twisted his hands nervously together. "I—I was meanin' to tell ye. I tried to tell ye that first night, but—my tongue stuck. I was feared ye'd turn me out; an' I was that cold an' miserable—"

"Tell me all about it now."

"Ye've got a doubt o' me somehow, but I'll tell ye; I'll tell ye God's truth about the whole thing." He got up and leaned with one hand on the back of his chair. "I come out here from Missouri, with a party what took claims in Californy Gulch. They was a rough crowd, an' a rougher lot come in after some of us struck pay. My claim didn't pan hardly to keep me goin' an' a man named Thorpe was next to me, an' got over on my line. He was a fightin' man, an' ready with his gun; but I didn't want no trouble, an' there had been more'n one man killed in jest such a fuss."

"You didn't quarrel with him, then?" Gor-

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don was gazing keenly at him, but the eyes of the miner looked steadily into his.

“Yes, I did. I didn’t want no fuss, but I wasn’t goin’ to be robbed for nothin’. We had had some hot words about it down in camp, an’ there was a crowd lookin’ on; but it didn’t go no furder that evenin’.” He tightened his grip on the chair. “It didn’t go no furder that evenin’. But when I come out to my claim in the mornin’, Thorpe was lyin’ dead on my side o’ the line. He’d been shot down, an’ there wasn’t no one to say who’d done it.

“I knowed how it ’d be. They didn’t have no law to speak of down there, an’ they’d made up the Vigilantes to keep things straight. An’ —an’ I run for it.

“I’m tellin’ ye God’s truth. I ain’t no fightin’ man, an’ I didn’t have no gun.

“I steered north, an’ I don’t know rightly how I lived, till that night I come over the Divide an’ peeked in at the winder. I didn’t mind the storm, but I was starvin’ an’ feelin’ like a hunted dog,—an’ I follerred ye home.”

“It sounds like a straight story; and you’ll have need of it. There’s a reward offered for you, with a full description of you as you were the night you came here.”

Missouri Pete’s face had a whiteness in it:

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"I'll be took. They'll hang me for what I never did!"

"Not unless I speak. No one here has seen you as you were that night, and no one would think of you so long as you are living in my house and working for me at the church. But that isn't the question.

"I am in sore doubt what to do. I have only your word for what you tell me. If I give you up, you would be taken to Fairplay—that's the county seat of the section you came from—and be tried by law; and the law would determine—"

"I'd never live to get there. They'd do the law themselves: he was lyin' there dead on my claim, an' we' quarrelled, an' I've nothin' to show I didn't do it."

"Ah; and you made it seem blacker by running away. That will look very ugly."

Pete drew his hand across his dry lips and stared helplessly at Gordon. "I never seen—I'm a lost man!"

Gordon rose and walked up and down the room. This man's life was in his hands; but who was he, Gordon, to decide so awful a question? Suppose that, after all, he had really fired the shot: then Justice demanded that he be given up for punishment, and a minister of God

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must be the last man to stand in the way. But if he were innocent, and sent to his death by a fatal chain of circumstance, and the blackest link in it forged by the man's own unthinking hand! Then, of all men, a minister of God is bound to stop that deed. And if that minister, instead of stopping it, should tie the noose with his own hand?

Gordon still paced the room. But then, there were the court and the law and the jury: by what right was he, an individual, to take their functions into his single hands? Let the law decide and take the responsibility. But in this particular case, what chance would the man have? In face of the apparent facts, and with similar crimes of such frequent occurrence, what jury would believe his story? And—he had forgotten that until now—the man had not only run away, but he had disguised himself!

Had this Missouri Pete told the truth? He had lied at his first coming; but that was natural. Had he told a true story now? Gordon believed that he had; and, besides, he had told all before he knew that a reward had been offered for him. Then there was the man's own self, as he had shown it every day since he had stood there, wet and shivering, in that room. Was it likely that that man——? The debate was coming to

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an end in Gordon's mind: his steps were slower: the frowning lines between his eyes were disappearing.

Unconsciously, his training as a minister had made it easy for him to assume a responsibility which other men might have shrunk from. He had been so long used to deciding questions of conscience that it was natural to him to be judging now the case of the man before him; and he had been so accustomed to interpret from the pulpit the Higher Law as the final appeal in every relation of human life that that Higher Court had become to him the one Voice whose word was absolute. It was not merely his belief, it was the consciousness in which he thought and lived.

Gordon had stopped walking, and the lines between his eyes had now entirely disappeared. The case was decided.

“Simon,—you will have to be Simon now, you know,—I’ve thought the whole thing out, and it’s best to leave things as they are. You can go back to your potatoes. The court is adjourned.”

The man had remained standing, following with his eyes that steady pacing to and fro, and knowing that his fate was in the balance. Even now the full meaning of Gordon’s words had not reached him.

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"Ye mean that—— Ye're not goin' to give me up, then?"

"I say that I believe your story, and that so far as I'm concerned it's all settled and done with. You had better stay here till all danger has passed; and the safest thing is to go about your work as usual."

Simon's face flushed as red as it had been pale before. "I'm—I'm not good at sayin' what I mean, but ye've been my friend an' a true partner, an' if ever I get the chance——!" There was a trembling in his voice and a moisture in his eyes.

"That's all right," said Gordon, with the characteristic phrase and manner which to Simon had the effect of "shettin' him up;" and he took up his hat and went back to the post-office.

Three months had come and gone. There had been no more rain in the mountains, and the gulch at the foot of the hill on which the little rectory was built was dry and dusty. Clouds of white dust rose from the wheels of the wagons carrying ore along the roads to the stamp-mills, and dark, white-edged thunder-clouds were often above the tops of the hills; but there had been no rain.

It was a July afternoon, and Gordon had

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turned at the door to say a last word to his wife. "I'm going up on the Divide. Old Trevarthen is failing, and I want to see how he is getting on." As he went up the road, he heard a little voice calling him, and saw his little daughter Dorothy running after. He stopped to tell her to go back to the house, and then went on his way.

The road led up the mountain, following the gulch which lay, deep and narrow, between it and the mountain on the opposite side. He was walking on, lost in thought, when—— What was that?

A confused, tumbling sound above him, deepening into a rushing roar like the mad down-pour of a mass of broken waters!

He knew what it meant: there had been a cloud-burst at the head of the gulch, and the flood was coming downward. He hurried up the side of the mountain to be out of harm's way, and from the vantage-point he had gained looked down to see the rush of the water. On it came, like a river dashed down a steep incline, and carrying rocks and broken timbers in a hurling confusion upon its flood. He thought at first only of the awful force and wonder of the scene: then he thought of the town below him, and of how the rush of the water would

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come without warning upon the lower roads and the teams which might be passing there.

It was all in sight through the clear air, and, almost before his thought was formed, he could see men running, and drivers whipping their mules, and—too late for some of them—wagons and mules overturned and swept down.

The sudden flood was spent and gone just below him, and he hurried down the mountain and back by the road he had come.

It was all over. Men were all about,—laughing, swearing, explaining,—and it was some time before he could get a clear answer to his question. Yes, some of the mules were drowned and a few wagons wrecked, but nothing else; no lives lost, anyway. This was contradicted by another: folks had been drowned,—a child, for certain,—down the gulch somewhere.

He hurried on, past the rectory on the hill, where he noticed that the front door was wide open, and so on to where he saw a crowd of men and women gathered together. They opened to let him through, and his face blanched at what he saw before him.

His wife was sitting on the ground, and little Dorothy was lying across her knees, apparently lifeless.

“She’s all right, Mr. Gordon,” said a kindly-

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voiced woman. "She's come to, an' only needs a little nursin' now. More praise to the man that saved her."

He turned quickly. "Who saved her? Which of you men am I to thank for her life?"

"None of us here," was the reply of one of them. "Come over this way, an' I'll show you the man."

There was some broken lumber on the ground, where it had been thrown and left by the water. A man was lying at full length upon it, with his face to the sky. But the eyes were closed, and the stillness of death was upon the form lying there so quietly.

"I was up there, near your house," said the one who had spoken before; "an' just as I seen the cloud-burst comin', this man here came rushin' down: 'The child,' he says,—'Gordon's child!' an' he tore past me, right into the track of the boomin' water."

Gordon was looking down at the dead face, and made no answer.

"I don't rightly know what happened next. They tell me that when they found them the child was lyin' on some brush, an' the drownded man was still holdin' on to her."

The rector sat in his study that night, to pre-

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pare a sermon for the next Sunday, and turned over the loose papers that his careless habits allowed to accumulate on his desk. Among them was the half-written sheet of notes which his mind had refused to work on some months before.

He picked it up and glanced at it. The text was there in full: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

He gazed at it awhile in silence, and then dipped his pen in ink. He had no trouble in writing the sermon now.

Kit

I. THE WAIF.

THE Mississippi River was rising fast. The spring flood had begun two days before, and the water was rising at the rate of six inches an hour. It was already almost at the level of the banks, and the road through the cut to the steam-boat landing was a muddy lake which opened through the banks, and which was creeping nearer every moment to the feet of a man who was standing there looking out upon the river.

Behind him, climbing slowly up the road which ascended from the river towards the bluffs, was a large wagon with an immense hooped canvas covering, a "prairie schooner," drawn lumberingly, with creaking wheels, by a team of four stout oxen, and followed by three men on foot, while a fourth man walked by the team, and shouted and urged them on with frequent blows of a long "blacksnake" whip, which he flourished and cracked over them.

Before him was the swollen and muddy river,

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with sudden swirls and eddies nearer shore, and its mid-stream marked by logs and boards and floating fragments of all sorts borne swiftly gulf-ward; and far down stream was the black smoke of the steam-boat which had landed the wagon yonder and this man a little while before.

He was a tall, lean, wiry-looking man, about forty years old. A kindly face, with blue eyes and a sandy, close-cropped beard, looked out from under a broad-brimmed slouch hat; a rough hunting-jacket was too short to conceal a leather case at the hip from which the butt end of a revolver protruded, and the corduroy breeches were stuck into the heavy-soled boots which completed his costume.

“It’s mebbe my last look at a white man’s country, an’ it’s good-by to you, old Mississip’. An’ you don’t keer a continental; you just go boomin’ along, an’ it’s all one to you whether I’m standin’ here or goin’ down drowned like one o’ your logs out yonder. I’ve fished on you an’ skiffed on you, an’ mighty poor luck you ever brought me; if you’d been half decent I wouldn’t be startin’ for the gold diggin’s now, an’ leavin’ the old folks to scratch gravel for a livin’ till I come back with my pockets full o’ shiners to make ‘em happy.”

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He was speaking his thoughts out aloud, after a fashion of his, and he looked back over his shoulder at the wagon, now half-way up the hill, and then out once more at the river.

“Good-by to you, then; an’ if I ever——” He had been looking down stream, and as he turned to go his eyes were arrested by a singular piece of wreckage which had just turned the bend above. It was coming head on, and seemed to be a sunken passenger steam-boat; for the pilot-house and upper deck were above water, and though both smoke-stacks were gone, and the forward state-rooms sunk to the line of the hurricane-deck, the after state-rooms were still clear and apparently lifted out of danger.

As it turned the sharp bend the force of the current carried it over towards the bank, and there the eddies and cross-currents caught it and swung it round, and showed that it was only the upper works of a steam-boat, cut off as clean from the hull and all below as if a monster knife had passed from bow to stern.

“A busted steam-boat, sure as my name is Jim Peters! An’ the biggest bust I ever seen,” he added, as the forlorn-looking wreck was whirled around once more and came helplessly nearer. Then a great swirl of the shore current caught it, and the bow end ploughed into the muddy

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lake at the roadway and stuck fast, while the outside current swung the stern against the bank, and made a dam against which the water rose and gurgled and bubbled.

"You've made the landin'," ejaculated Jim, "but you're a leetle behind time in doin' it. Blest if you ain't the cleanest an' down-forsakenest old bust I ever seen!" The forward cabins were now out of water, and he could see that the windows on one side had all been smashed in, and there was a great gash in the side, and the guards and wood-work had been splintered and shattered. He looked at it a moment as it lay there, and then he sat down, and pulled off his boots and woollen socks and rolled up his trousers above his knees. "I'll have a look at you, anyway, before I go."

He waded out to the bow end and looked in at one of the cabin windows. It was an ordinary state-room, empty, but berths and everything in it dripping with water and covered with slimy mud. He waded along to the opening which had been broken in the side, and went through it, and found himself in the main saloon. The deck which formed the floor was solid as ever, but the chairs and sofas and tables were upset and tumbled in every direction; some pictures lay upon the floor with the glass broken, and

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the carpet was soaked and muddy and oozy at every step.

He went towards the light, trying the doors of the state-rooms as he went, but finding them all empty, and the same muddy drip and little pools upon the floors. Then he stopped still, with his mouth open and his eyes wide-staring. The sofa under the stern windows was fastened to the wall, and two arm-chairs had fallen against it, with their arms interlocked and their legs up in the air, like two old gentlemen whose dinner had been too much for them. It was a ridiculous looking thing; but it wasn't that which had brought Jim to a sudden stand. A little boy was lying on the sofa, white and still.

“Dead!” said the man, and he drew a step nearer. “Poor little chap! Stone dead, an’ lyin’ here all alone in this busted old coffin! What on earth’s to be done now?” He stooped down and laid one big rough hand on the child’s hair and kissed him on the forehead. “Poor little—— Why, great jiminy, this child ain’t dead! Wake up, little one! Hi-hallo! We’ve got to the landin’!” And he put his arms around the child and lifted him to a sitting posture, kneeling down in front of him, and holding him back against the sofa.

The child opened his eyes. He was apparently

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between two and three years old, stout and handsome, with dark, curly hair and dark-brown eyes; a little blouse of black velvet fitted him neatly to the waist, and a skirt of Scotch plaid came to his knees, and his chubby legs were encased in stockings of the same pattern.

“That’s it, young un’. Now how did you get here, an’ what does it all mean?”

The child stared at him, and the brown eyes filled with tears, and the lips began to quiver. “Mamma! Papa!”

“I’m your mammy now, sonny. Where’s your pappy, an’ how long hev you been here?”

“Baby ‘ont d’ink;” and the little fellow lifted up his voice and wailed.

“Right you are, an’ baby shall have a drink. Come along with me;” and he took the child in his arms and waded back to the spot where he had left his boots. There he sat him down on the grass, and going again to the river, filled his hat with water, and made it into a scoop from which the baby might drink. And drink he did, ravenously, choking and strangling as Jim in his eagerness tipped the hat too freely, but clutching at it when Jim drew it back, and sucking for the water when it didn’t come fast enough.

At last he seemed satisfied and sat quiet, staring with round baby eyes at Jim; and Jim

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pulled his wet hat down tight again on his head, and slowly scratched his chin, and stared back at him in turn.

“Blest if I know what to do with you! I can’t leave you here, an’ it won’t never do to put you back on that sinkin’ old consarn all by yourself; you might get drownded, you know. An’ there ain’t no houses round here for miles an’ miles; an’, of course, I can’t take you.”

The baby laughed. “Me ‘ont mo’ d’ink!”

“It ain’t so much of a joke as you seem to think, young un’. We ain’t got no call for babies this trip, an’——” He looked up the road. The wagon was out of sight, and one of the men was standing at the turn of the bluff and waving to him to come on.

The little fellow rose on his sturdy little legs, and toddled off up the road as fast as he could go. Jim looked after him and laughed again. “I reckon you’ve got it right and you’re bound to go ‘long; there ain’t no other way, till I can drop you somewhere. So here goes!” He got up, and with another look at the wrecked upper deck and its cabins and the ruined desolation of it all, he went after the child, and taking him up in his strong arms, trudged on up the hill after his companions.

They had gained a good mile on through his

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stay at the river; and the sun was setting, and the oxen had been unyoked and tethered out for the night, and the men were gathering sticks for a fire to cook their supper by, when the two strangely assorted companions appeared.

“Great snakes, Jim! What have you got there?”

“It’s a baby, Dan,” he replied, as he gravely put the youngster on the ground; “a real live baby!”

The other men came running up, and all stood in a circle round the boy. “Where did you ever pick it up?”

“Found it in the top half of a steam-boat that came cavortin’ round the bend an’ got stuck in the cut at the landin’. This young un’ was the only passenger aboard.”

“Honor bright, Jim?”

“Honor bright; it’s just as I tell you. It was a reg’lar smash-up; an’ this here little fellow was lyin’ on a sofa, tired out an’ fast asleep, an’ so white an’ tuckered out that I thought he was dead. But he wasn’t; an’ I took him ashore, and he wanted a drink; an’ great jiminy! you ought to hev seen him suck it in!”

The men stared at the child who was sitting contentedly on the ground and sucking hard at his thumb, and then looked at each other and

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at Jim. "What are you goin' to do with him?"

"Blamed if I know. Put him in the wagon, I reckon, till I can drop him onto somebody; it's a reg'lar conniption fix to be in!"

"He's no common young un', from the cut of his clothes," said Dan Brown, looking critically at him. "That's a rich man's child. What's his pap's name?"

"What's his great-grandmother's name!" replied Jim. "How should I know? An' the boy don't know neither; don't know nothin' but 'pappy' and 'mammy' and 'd'ink;' he's immense on the 'd'ink!'"

"He'll be immense on the eat too," said Jack Williams, "if you'll give him a chance. Look at him chew that thumb!"

"We'll have the fire goin' in a minute," said Dan, "an' we can give him some hot coffee. Get him a piece o' that pie we bought on the boat, till I can get the coffee ready," and he hurried away.

"Hold on," cried Jim, as another of the men started for the wagon; "I don't b'lieve babies like him ever eats pie."

The man stopped and turned half round. "What do they eat, then?"

Jim didn't know; none of the men knew.

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They were all unmarried, and had never considered such questions before.

"We might try some o' that jerked beef," said one, tentatively. "An' there's them crackers an' that Bologna sausage we was keepin' for a rainy day."

The unanimous vote was, fortunately, for the crackers. And they sat around on their heels with their hands on their knees, and laughed and worked their own jaws in pure sympathy at the way the hungry youngster devoured them, doubling his little fists around one and trying to cram them both into his mouth at once.

"My sakes!" said Jim, nudging his elbow into the man next him. "Don't the young un' eat, though—eh?" And he sat down to feed the crackers to his charge as they might be wanted, while the other men went to help with the supper.

They were five honest, rough-mannered, and good-hearted men, part of the great army that in those days was streaming across prairies and plains for the newly-discovered gold-fields of Colorado. By dint of selling what little property they had, and by putting their savings together, they had a fair equipment for their journey,—two pairs of stout oxen and a big wagon, with rifles and provisions and miner's tools,—and a baby!"

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That unexpected infant had gone to sleep in Jim's arms after his supper of crackers, and after putting him to bed on the bottom of the wagon, wrapped up in a light blanket and with a coat rolled up for a pillow, Jim had come back to where the others were lying on the ground, smoking their cob pipes and discussing the situation.

"Guess his folks was all drowned," Jack Williams was saying.

"Accordin' to Jim's account o' that wreck there couldn't have been none o' them saved."

"They'd never have left that child there if they'd been alive," said Dan. "The little chap must have crawled onto that sofa after the rest was drowned."

"'Pears like a shame to drop him after he's been fairly throwed into our hands like that," said Reuben Miller, the youngest of the party. "You'd better keep him, Jim, an' take him along as part of your kit."

Jim puffed at his pipe thoughtfully. "I don't say but what I was thinkin' that way myself when he was sleepin' in my arms. It makes a fellow feel queer to hev a little trustin' thing like that lyin' there an' dependin' on you to take keer of him. An' as to takin' him as a part of my kit, he'd be the queerest kit that was ever took

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to the gold diggin's. An' there!" he exclaimed, bringing one hand down on his knee, "there is his name! I'll call him 'Kit,' an' we'll keep him, anyway, till we can drop him in some good home."

At sunrise next morning they were again upon the road. The ways of civilization were left behind them, and the unknown and almost trackless West stretched away before them. And the wheels of their "prairie schooner" creaked and the oxen lumbered on, and the waif of the wreck sat inside on a bag of shelled corn and laughed and crowded, and fairly deserved the encomium which the delighted Jim passed to his companions.

"He's got more sense, has Kit, than any young un' of his age I have ever seen."

Two days before, the following item had appeared in the telegraphic reports of the daily newspapers:

"A BAD ACCIDENT.

"CAIRO, ILLINOIS.

"The steamer 'Morewood' left the wharf for New Orleans last night at eight o'clock. There was a high stage of water and the current was very strong, and in attempting to pass under the bridge the pilot lost control of the boat. She

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was dashed against the pier, and with such violence that the hull parted from the main-deck and immediately sunk, and the upper portion, containing the state-rooms, etc., was carried off down stream in a sinking condition. Several tugs went in pursuit of the floating wreck, and succeeded in taking off the passengers. It was at first supposed that every soul had been saved, but it is now known that one child, the son of Henry Sherlock, Esq., of New York, must have been drowned. Owing to the darkness and confusion, and the mixing up of passengers on the different tugs, it was thought that the child was among the rescued; but he has not been found, and has doubtless perished. He was an only child, and the parents are distracted with grief."

II. KIT'S CAMP.

AT the head of Clear Creek Cañon, a little above where the mining town of Central City now stands, there are two gulches, running into one deep gulch at the lower ends and enclosing a hill between them. To the traveller of 1892 the gulches are dry with dust and gravel, and the hills all around are rocky and bare, without so much as a blade of grass or a tree; and it is hard to believe that, not so many years ago, brawling mountain streams, filled with trout,

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ran down those gulches, and that those hills and ravines were so thick with pine and fir and cedar that a man might lose his way in going only a mile from one mining camp to another.

Yet so it was ; and on that hill between the gulches, with only a falling log cabin to tell of it to-day, were the rude log homes of nearly ten thousand men. They had been built with some pretence of regular streets, and saloons and gambling-houses were thick in every block, and did a bad and thriving business day and night, for “Missouri City” was the centre of the gold-mining region of Colorado.

It was almost entirely “surface” mining then (turning the water of the mountain streams aside into roughly-made sluices, and searching the natural beds of the torrents and the bottoms of the sluices for gold), and all day long the sound of axes was in the air, cutting the timber for the sluices and for fires, and for building cabins in which to live ; and far into the night, and often all night long, the saloons and gambling-houses were in full swing.

Half a mile from the town, and on the side of the hill near the right-hand gulch, was a mining camp of a few log cabins. They were roughly built of unhewn logs, unplastered, with no other furniture than a dry-goods box for a table and

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cots of pine branches and blankets for beds. The camp was, like hundreds of others scattered through the mountains, mere shelters for men whose every thought was spent on getting gold, and nothing to distinguish one camp from another. But this one little group of log houses had a name of its own, and was known throughout the foot-hills from Denver to James's Peak as "Kit's Camp."

Men tramped miles over the mountains to see it with their own eyes. There wasn't a camp that didn't feel itself still linked with the old home beyond the plains, through knowing that a child-life lived in the midst of their rough and wild surroundings ; and the dwellers in Missouri City fought with each other in being the first to tell the stranger within their gates : "This ain't nothin', stranger ; wait till ye see our Kit. A baby! Ye hear me? A live baby ; an' the only one in Colorado!"

No one knew anything more about the child than the simple fact that he was there. Jim and his friends had kept their own counsel, and it was supposed that Jim was in some way related to the boy. Every one was too intent upon his own affairs to trouble himself about his neighbor's, and any curiosity which they might have had was lost in the greater and never-ceasing

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wonder that a child should be there at all. He was "Jim Peters's Kit," and that was the end of it.

Kit himself was sitting in the door-way of the largest cabin on this September evening, beating a tattoo on a tin cup with a knife by way of welcome to a man coming slowly up the hill. A year and a half had gone by since Jim had waded with him in his arms to the shore, and his handsome little face was browned with sun and wind, and he was as healthy and strong as plain food and the pure, fresh mountain air could make him. He had outgrown the little velvet waist and plaid skirt, which had been replaced by rougher nondescript garments of Jim's own manufacture; they were not very stylish in cut, and the seams were decidedly "bunchy," but Jim took great pride in them, and would turn Kit round to show off the strong points in them: "Made 'em all myself, every stitch o' 'em, an' I never held a needle afore."

The man coming up the hill had a pick and shovel on his shoulder, and he waved his free hand in answer to the clattering welcome; and at that the child ran with a joyful shout to meet him, and the man threw down the pick and shovel and caught him in his arms and kissed him, and then set him on the ground and stood

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back admiringly: "Why, Kit, you've growed! I declare you've growed since mornin'. I never see such a child!"

Kit laughed delightedly. "I'm mos' as big as you; ain't I, Jim? An', Jim, you mus' make me a pair o' pants an' take me wiz you to wash gold."

"I'm goin' to, Kit," he replied, taking up his tools and going towards the cabin. "I've been turnin' them pants over in my mind; an' thinkin', mebbe, I could slit one o' the legs o' an old pair o' mine an' sew 'em up royal for you. But it's the upper fixin's that fetches me; I ain't caught on to that, somehow."

They went into the cabin, and Jim lighted the fire and began to get ready the supper, Kit putting the tin plates and the tin cups on the primitive table, and keeping up a continuous chatter, to Jim's great delight, as he ran here and there.

"Just to think," Jim said, half to himself, as he turned the sputtering bacon he was frying, "to think that I was goin' to drop you onto somebody, to get rid o' you. Why, there wouldn't be no livin' without you, Kit, you know."

"There wouldn't be no one to take care o' you, Jim," replied Kit, shaking his head with a self-importance that was very funny, but which

KIT

Jim took in all seriousness; "an' the table wouldn't get set, an' there wouldn't be no one to watch for you at the door. I'm glad you took me off that—that—"

"Steam-boat," said Jim.

"That—steam-boat that was—" He stopped again.

"Busted?" suggested Jim.

"Busted," repeated Kit, gravely. "An' I'm goin' to have a gun an' shoot wabbits, an' Dan says they're comin' now." And he broke off suddenly and ran to the door, and in a moment more the other men came in.

They were the same rough, good-natured men as when they had stood around Kit on the bluff by the river, only now their clothes were old and patched and their faces browned and bearded. And after supper they sat around on the cabin-floor by the light of the fire and smoked their pipes, while Kit nestled close to Jim, who had one arm around him.

"It's just throwin' ourselves away," Dan Brown was saying, "to stay here any longer. The best claims was all took before we come, an' for the last two weeks it's been all work an' no pay."

"Hardly seen the color o' gold in all the dirt we've dug and sluiced for a month," assented

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Jack Williams, "an' them sutlers at Missouri charge ten prices for every bite we buy."

"This gold-washin' is about played out, any-way," said another. "There's got to be reg'lar minin' done afore long, an' them that's got the money are the men that's goin' to win."

"I seen that red-headed fellow from Californy—him they call 'Brick Top'—down in the gulch to-day," said Dan, "an' he was full of goin' back where he came from."

Jim nodded. "I seen him, too; an' he says that nothin' but stamp-mills an' deep minin' will ever get the real gold out. He's coming here to-night."

The words were hardly spoken when a step was heard outside, and the expected visitor lounged in and seated himself carelessly on the box which served as a table. "Evenin', pard. Thought as how I'd drop in an' say good-by; I'm goin' back to Californy."

"You're makin' a short stay?"

"Sho! nothin' here but dirt now; an' if I hev to dig for the shiners, give me the Sierras every time! That's a fine boy you've got," he added, looking at Kit; "but sluice me dry if I ever heerd of bringin' a child to the diggin's afore; it rakes the pile. His mammy dead?"

Jim stroked the little head and drew him

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closer. "He ain't got no mammy, an' no pappy,—they was drownded ; there ain't no one but me."

"Drownded? Sho! you don't say? But I reckoned his mammy was dead by the cut of his jib; they're the curiosest clothes I ever seen."

Jim's face got red, and the other men laughed, and Dan Brown broke in, "Them's only his workin' rig. Show him your circus clothes, Kit. Bring out the spangles."

Kit jumped up and ran to a box in the corner of the room, and brought the faded little velvet blouse with its tarnished gilt buttons, and the plaid skirt and stockings,—the stockings having little more than the legs left,—and laid them out with pride upon the table.

"Now you're shoutin'!" exclaimed the red-headed man. "Why you was dressed like a Californy nabob, Kit." He took up the little clothes and held them against the child, and then tossed them back upon the table and turned to go: "Good-by, Kit. Good luck to ye, pards."

"I'm a Californy miner with my pick an' iron pan,
An' I'm always goin' to strike it rich to-morrow."

And they heard him singing till the distance closed him in.

KIT

They sat silent for some minutes after he had gone. Kit had nestled down again in his favorite place by Jim's knee. "Jim," the boy said suddenly, "why don't we go to California an' st'ike it wich?"

"Listen to him!" said Jim, looking round upon the others admiringly. "You've got more sense, Kit, than the whole lot of us. What do you say, Dan? Speak up, the rest o' ye. I vote with Kit, an' I'm ready to go to-morrow."

There was nothing in the way. They had worked out their claim and had saved their money, and their free, untrammelled life had woven its charm around them, and they were ready for any new venture that might open. Dan knew where he could get a pair of good stout mules to carry Kit and their traps as far as Denver, and there they could buy a wagon and go to any point they might choose.

The change of plan was heartily accepted by all. This was Monday night, and on Wednesday morning they would start at daybreak on their new road.

Before they turned in for the night Jim went to the door to close it, and he stood there so long that one of the men asked him if he was "lookin' for ghosts?"

"No," he replied; "but I'm lookin' at some-

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thin' I never seen before; the clouds look as if they were afire."

The others came out, and all stood together, wondering what it might mean. West and north and south the skies were lighted up with fires,—not flickering and unsteady gleams, but a steady, continuous glow. During the day the air had been thick and hazy as if with smoke, but the hills and the pine woods had intercepted any view of the cause, even if they had thought that it might be a forest fire. Now it was plain that it was not only a fire, but that it must be of great extent and burning steadily. It was impossible to tell how far it might be away; but the night was still and with hardly a breath of wind, and there could be no immediate danger. So they came again inside and shut the door.

But early next morning men came hurrying in from mining camps beyond, and reported the woods on fire on every side, and spreading rapidly. The wind, too, had risen, and was blowing from the west, and the air was not only thick with smoke but full of the smell of burning. By noon the alarm was general, and the work in the gulches stopped, and all Missouri City poured itself out to fight the fires. It was an army of men with picks and shovels and axes, fighting to save their homes and to beat

KIT

back the flames. They made trenches, they piled up earth, they cut down trees, they lighted back fires. They drew the line of defence in a half-circle, a mile from the town, and all that afternoon and night every man who had so much as a dollar to lose worked hard and desperately.

By sunrise Wednesday morning they had won the hard-fought fight. The course of the fire was stayed, and Missouri City and the camps around it were saved. Nothing remained to be done but to check any fires that might start inside the line from burning embers carried by the wind, and to set guards to see that it was cared for.

Then the workers returned to their homes, and Missouri City, which from Tuesday until Wednesday noon had been as solitary and deserted as a city of the dead, again took on its customary noise and bustle and excitement, increased by the clamor of voices discussing the events of the fire, and with a prospect of being worse rather than better for the experience through which it had gone.

In the gray dawn of that Wednesday morning two mules laden with miner's tools, and accompanied by five bearded men in patched and well-worn clothes, were climbing toilsomely

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up the long Smith's Hill by Clear Creek Cañon. They stopped to rest upon the top for a few minutes, then disappeared from sight behind it.

And on one of the mules was Kit.

III. THE MAN AT THE GRAND HOTEL.

THE Grand Hotel, San Francisco, was a general meeting-place for the men of all nations.

Ruddy, well-fed Englishmen and alert, wide-awake Yankees jostled in the halls and waiting-rooms and wide verandas with swarthy, long-haired Caballeros from Mexico, and fair-faced Germans from over-sea; ranchmen with well-lined pockets elbowed sleek, cool gamblers waiting for a chance to transfer the lining to themselves; and miners from the hills, in wide-brimmed hats and red shirts, and trousers tucked into their boots, sauntered in and out with free-and-easy air, as if they owned the place and its belongings.

In the office the clerk had just turned the hotel register towards a dozen new arrivals who stood in line at the desk to sign their names.

One of them was a tall and well-dressed man, apparently not more than thirty-five years of age, though his dark hair was already slightly sprinkled with gray, and the keen dark eyes and firm mouth and quiet, resolute bearing marked him

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as one who was accustomed to have his orders obeyed. He was the last man in the line; and when the clerk had given him the pen, he signed the register in a clear, business hand, *Henry Sherlock, New York.*

The clerk glanced at it, and put opposite the number of his room and touched a bell: "Take this gentleman's baggage to No. 14, second floor. Dinner from one to three, sir."

The variegated human stream flowed in and out and collected in groups of twos and threes, and then flowed on again; and after dinner Mr. Sherlock went outside and sat on the veranda and watched the changing scene. He had been sitting there for half an hour when a man came up the steps, stopped short, and looked sharply at him, and then came forward with his hand outstretched.

"Halloa, Sherlock! Who ever thought to see you here?"

Mr. Sherlock got up and shook hands heartily: "Why, Morton, it's ten years since I saw you last. When did you come?"

"Me? Oh, I'm living here. I took Greeley's advice and came out as soon as I left Harvard. But what brings you here?"

"I've come to look after the affairs of the Rosita Mining Company. I'm president of the

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concern, and, being rather overworked by that and other business, I thought I'd take a vacation and see the Rosita property at the same time."

"Business and pleasure together, eh? That seldom works well for the pleasure side of it. But tell me a little about yourself and everything that has happened."

They sat down together. "There isn't much to tell. I went into my uncle's office in Wall Street for a while, after leaving old Harvard; and when I had the run of the business a little in hand, I tried it for myself. It was uphill work at first, but I got along, and now, I suppose, I might be called fairly successful."

"Any family?"

"Yes, I have a wife, but no children. We had one child,—a little boy; but we lost him. He was drowned a year and a half ago."

"Ah! I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yes, he was drowned, and we never recovered the body. We were going to New Orleans at the time, and took steamer from Cairo,—my wife and myself and the little boy; he was then nearly three years old. But in leaving the wharf the boat somehow struck the bridge. The river was high, and I suppose the pilot couldn't control the steering, and the hull

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broke from the upper deck and sank, and we were all in danger of drowning. At the time of the accident we were all at supper, and the nurse had taken the child, and in the darkness and confusion and the panic of the passengers we couldn't find him, but thought it certain that both he and the nurse had been taken off by one of the tug-boats which had followed and rescued us. But we never saw the child again. The nurse had got separated from him in the rush of the crowd to get off the sinking deck to the tugs, and he must have been left behind and been drowned."

A miner, in a bright-red woollen shirt, and with hair that rivalled it in color, was standing near by, leaning against one of the pillars of the veranda, and appeared to be taking a languid interest in the story.

"And you never found a trace of him?" asked Morton.

Mr. Sherlock shook his head. "No, not a trace. The wrecked upper half of the steam-boat was found by a tug-boat which I sent off next morning, stranded and half sunk on the right bank of the Mississippi, but there was no sign of the little boy. I employed agents, and advertised everywhere along the river, in hope of recovering the body; but all failed. And

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there was no chance of mistaking the child if the body had been found ; he had dark hair and eyes, a handsome little fellow, and he wore at the time a black velvet waist with gilt buttons, and a Scotch plaid skirt and plaid stockings. No ; he was lost forever. My wife was broken-hearted, and it made an old man of me before my time.

The red-headed man had come gradually nearer, till he was now standing close by the speaker's chair, and at this moment he touched him on the shoulder. "How old did you say the boy was?"

Mr. Sherlock turned in surprise, but, seeing only sympathy and eager interest in the questioner's eyes, he answered courteously, "He would be four years old now, sir, if he had lived," and then turned again to Mr. Morton.

But the man persisted: "An' he had a little black velvet jacket, with gold buttons an' them other fixin's ye was tellin' of?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Sherlock, still more surprised, and staring hard at him.

"Then, by the jumpin' jiminy ! I've seen yer boy, an' he ain't any more dead than I am !"

Both gentlemen stood up, and Mr. Sherlock turned white and steadied himself on the chair. "You've seen him ! Where ?"

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“In Kit’s Camp, at the head o’ Clear Creek Cañon, in Colorado. The young un’s name, ye see, is Kit, an’ he’s livin’ with some miners what thinks his folks is all drowned. Le’ me git ye a brandy stiff’ner, mister; ye’re a little shaky in the legs.”

“No, no; I’ll be all right in a moment. You think that——”

“Kit? I’m dead sure of it. He don’t belong to them miners, an’ I seen them clothes with my own eyes. *An’ for the right-outest wallopinest young un’ ye ever seen, yer ought to be proud of him!*”

“And your name, sir?”

“Brick Top is what I goes by mostly. I was up there tryin’ them diggin’s, an’ that there Kit hisself brought out them things an’ showed ‘em to me, ‘cos I laughed at the cur’ous way he’s rigged up now. Shoot me dead if it wouldn’t make a quartz rock split itself laughin’.”

“Be careful, Sherlock,” said Morton; “you may build false hopes on a mere accidental resemblance?”

“No,” replied Mr. Sherlock; “it is unaccountable how my little Harry should be in a miner’s camp in the Rocky Mountains, but I feel that what this man says is true.—Sit down, sir,” he said to Brick Top. “Morton, find out

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at once the quickest way to Colorado. Now, sir, where is this Clear Creek Cañon? Tell me everything."

Brick Top sat down. "Your pard is a keerful hand," he said, "but I reckon I've got the lay-over in this business." He counted off on the fingers of his hand: "There's the boy, an' the clothes, an' his bein' the right age, an' his pappy and his mammy bein' drowned,—an' them four aces rakes the pile."

They talked on for an hour, Mr. Sherlock asking over and over again a hundred questions about Kit. And when he had learned all that Brick Top had to tell, he rose and took the miner's hand: "You've done something for me to-day that I'll never forget; and if I find that child you will hear from me again. Here is my card and address. Write and tell me where you can be found."

"All right; I'll let ye know. I'll be consarned glad to hear ye got yer boy." And he went down the steps singing to himself,—

"I'm a Californy miner with my pick an' iron pan,
An' I'm always goin' to strike it rich to-morrow."

How that afternoon and evening passed away Mr. Sherlock never could remember. There was, first of all, a letter to be written to his wife,

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—not too abrupt nor too hopeful a letter, but enough to prepare her for a great surprise to come. But the rest of the day was a blank; and with the first light of the next morning he was up and ready for the journey. His heart laughed with the “Tra-la-la!” of the driver’s bugle as the overland stage rattled up to the door of the Grand Hotel; and never did four fast horses carry a happier or more eager passenger as they went at full swing down street and away.

But there were mountains to be crossed, and long miles of plain to be got over, and it seemed as if that journey would never end. But he was in Denver at last; and in fifteen minutes from the time the stage stopped he was in the office of a livery-stable.

“Let me have a buggy and a driver, and the two best horses you have, to Missouri City and return.”

“Yes, sir; ready in ten minutes, sir.” And as the buggy rattled off the stable-keeper turned to one of his men, “He’s got thirty miles before him, Joe, and half of it uphill, but he’ll make it before night,—I saw it in his eye.”

And he did make it. From the time he took his seat beside the driver he never spoke a word till the horses were trotting down the irregular

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main street of the log-built Missouri City, and then he only said, half under his breath, "Drive me on to Kit's Camp."

"I can't," said the driver, reining in his team. "There ain't no road beyond this; nothing but a trail."

"Very well. Put up your horses here for the night; we will go back in the morning."

He got down.

The street, as usual, was full of men, and the saloons and gambling-houses were beginning to be lighted up for their evening's business. A little crowd had gathered about the buggy as it stopped, and he spoke to the man nearest him. "Can you tell me the way to Kit's Camp?"

He did not ask any one to go with him; he wanted to be alone.

"Straight down to the end of the street, stranger, an' then follow the trail to the left; you can't miss it. 'Tain't much to see now," he added, as the stranger started to go; "there's nothin' there but log cabins, now that Kit's gone."

Mr. Sherlock stopped and turned. "Now that— *What?*"

"Now that Kit's gone. Our Kit, ye know; must have heerd of our Kit."

"*Gone!*"

KIT

"Gone, scooped, vamoosed ; left the diggin's, ye know."

"Where did he go?" The questioner passed his hand across his forehead as if dazed.

"May I never git the drop on another man if I can tell ye. There was a rip-roarin' fire here in the woods, an' every man in Missouri City an' all around went out to fight it; not a soul that didn't go. An' next mornin' Kit an' all his crew was gone, an' there wasn't no one that had seen 'em; clean left, an' not a word from 'em since. An' we reckon that, like as not, the boy foller'd the men to the fire, an' they was all burned."

"But their cabin and their tools?"

"We ain't no tender-foots, stranger, and we thought of all that. There wasn't nothin' in the cabin worth takin' with 'em, an' if they was at the fire they'd have their picks an' shovels an' axes with 'em in the woods. There wasn't nothin' to tell by that way, an' I've got a standin' bet of ten dollars with Coonskin Joe that we'll come across their skeletins."

Mr. Sherlock slowly turned away. The disappointment was so sharp and sudden that he needed time to get over the first great shock of it. It was almost like losing his child a second time. He went on down the street, and put

KIT

up for the night at the best reputed so-called hotel, and there questioned more trustworthy informers.

He found that a pair of mules had been previously purchased, and that everything pointed towards an intentional departure. But as to the main facts there could be no doubt. Kit and his friends had gone, and there had been nobody to see them go.

The next morning saw a notice on the bulletin-board of the hotel, and other notices in the same words at the prominent places of the town,—

“\$5000 REWARD.

“The above reward will be given for any information which shall lead to the recovery of the child of Henry Sherlock, Esq., of New York. The boy is about four years old, with dark hair and dark eyes. He was supposed to have been lost on the steamer ‘Morewood,’ Cairo to New Orleans, which was wrecked by collision with a pier of the bridge. The boy is known as ‘Kit,’ and he was last seen with a man named Jim Peters, and others, in the ‘Kit Camp,’ near Missouri City. Five thousand dollars will be paid to any one who shall give definite information as to where the child can be found.

“Address,

“HENRY SHERLOCK,
“Grand Hotel, San Francisco,
“or 52 Wall Street, New York.”

IV. THE ROSITA MINE.

IT was the middle of December. The air was clear and frosty, and the jets of steam which rose in steady, regular puffs from the shaft-house on the mountain-side showed white as snow against the blue sky. The stamps in the stamp-mill pounded away, crushing into powder the quartz-bearing rock which was bringing the gold to its owners; and wagons were coming and going, stirring up the white dust on the road, and making the mules and drivers look as if they had sifted flour.

On the opposite side of the gulch, straggling irregularly over the hill-side, were some three hundred roughly-built frame houses. They were for the most part only one story high, containing a couple of rooms each, and the larger houses of the superintendent and managers of the works, at the upper end of the gulch and close by the big company store and stables, looked aristocratic in comparison.

A mere semblance of a road led from the store to the houses on the hill, winding in front of one and behind another, so that it was impossible to say whether the road had been there before the houses or the houses before the road. That, at least, was the question in the mind of a

KIT

red-headed man in a woollen shirt and corduroy trousers, who was coming over the hill and bearing down towards the store. "Looks as if they'd been throwed there," he said aloud to himself, "an' just happened to light that way. An' yon shaft must be the Rosita."

He was going by one of the shanties as he spoke, and his attention had apparently been attracted by something he had caught a glimpse of in passing, for he stopped and went back a few paces.

On the slope of the hill behind the house, and about fifty feet up from the road, a child was digging in the ground with a kitchen-knife. His back was towards the man, and he was absorbed in what he was doing.

"Hello!"

The child turned round. "Hello!"

"Kit! Well, if this don't beat all, ye can put my head in a stamp-mill. Where's your pap?"

"I hain't got no pap." He turned back to his work and continued digging. "My pap's drowned. There ain't no one but Jim."

The man went on down the hill. "Then it wasn't the right boy, after all," he said to himself, "an' the clothes and everything was wrong; an' I thought I held a full hand!"

But at supper-time he came back, and met

KIT

with a warm welcome. He found Jim and Kit behind the house, sitting together at the spot where the boy had been digging that morning. "He's playin' at diggin' a mine," Jim explained, when the greetings were over; "he's got a hole here more'n a foot deep already, an' he says he's goin' to 'st'ike it wich!" and Jim winked at the new-comer in great amusement. If Kit had wanted Jim's ears to put in that hole, it is doubtful whether he could not have had them.

Then they went inside; and there were many questions to ask and to answer, while Jim explained how he and his friends happened to be there. How they had not had much luck, being like thousands of others who had been smitten with gold fever, and who had come to a new land, without experience and without knowledge of the conditions; and how, while travelling farther westward, they had heard everywhere of the famous Rosita and the big wages that were paid at that mine, and had resolved to go there and work and save their money until they could go prospecting for themselves. And how he and Kit were living by themselves and had almost no rent to pay; for all that side of the hill was owned by the president of the Rosita Company, and he had put up the houses and was content with small returns.

KIT

And then there was Kit's new outfit to be admired, for Jim had carried out his idea of "splitting one leg of his old trousers," and Brick Top did not conceal his unbounded delight at the extraordinary result to poor Kit. But though he easily discovered that Mr. Sherlock had altogether missed finding them, never a word did he speak of what he had seen and heard. He had his own idea of what ought to be done, and he kept his own counsel.

When he came back the next evening he found Jim and Kit again on the hill-side, digging away at the hole. To please the child, Jim had entered into the spirit of the play, and had dug it deeper. It was now about four feet deep, and Jim was standing in it and shovelling out the dirt, while Kit was busy piling it up in imitation of the great dump at Rosita.

Their visitor sat down just below them. "A reg'lar miner, Kit, ain't ye? There ain't many spots, Jim, on this hill where ye could dig like that; most of it's hard rock and slate, an' not enough earth on it to grow grass on."

A lump of dirt rolled down from Kit's dump, and he took it in his hand. "Now, this here——" He stopped, and lifted the lump closer to his face, and broke it in his hand. His experienced eye had noted something unusual. "Kit, my

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boy, run into the house an' bring me a pan with some water in it; any kind of a pan will do."

Kit ran down, and came back in a few minutes with a small pan half full of water. The miner crumbled some of the dirt into it, and then tilted it to and fro, pouring off the muddy water little by little, till there was only a handful of watery sediment left in the pan. Then he inclined the pan and tilted it slowly to the right and left, looking sharply at the edges of the muddy sand as it flowed from him and towards him.

Then he laid it down and went up and looked at the hole. "It's only a 'chimney,'" he said, at length; "but from the looks of things it may go down a good way. Kit, ye've struck it rich at last,—*there's gold, an' good gold, in that hole!*"

Mr. Sherlock was sitting in his office in Wall Street, looking over a pile of letters and papers which lay before him on the desk, and noting rapidly with a pencil from time to time the disposition to be made of them. He had henceforth but one thing before him,—to find his boy; and he had hurried to New York to arrange his business, so that he might be free to continue his search as long and as far as might be necessary. His head clerk could be trusted to carry

KIT

out all matters of detail, and he was now busy in marking down final directions. At last all was finished except a batch of letters which had come by the afternoon mail. He hastily tore them open and glanced over them, and then swept them all aside as he bent over a half-sheet of foolscap paper which he had drawn from the last envelope, and which was scrawled in an unsteady hand.

“MISTER SHERLOCK,—I’ve found your Kit, up here at the Rosita, an’ I’ll hev him fer ye this time, if I hev to sit on him till ye come, So no more from yours truly,

“BRICK TOP.

“P.S.—I ain’t told Jim yet.

“P.S.—Kit is screamin’ in a split leg o’ Jim’s : thought I should die. B. T.”

“At the Rosita.” Mr. Sherlock folded up the letter and thanked God.

The final postscript was both mysterious and alarming, but at least Kit was still alive. Not dead and white at the bottom of the river, the dark hair tangled in the weeds, and the dear little face looking so helpless and forsaken,—oh, the thousand times he had seen it so in his dreams! And not burned and lost forever in

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the Colorado woods; but saved,—saved and alive! Would he ever be able to show the dear little fellow how he loved him? Would he ever be able to thank God enough for the child who had been given back to him from the dead?

The train which left New York that night for Chicago carried a different man from the one who had left San Francisco four months before on his first anxious journey. The passengers with whom he travelled by rail and stage thought him the most cheerful and agreeable companion they had ever met; and when a woman travelling alone with a sick and crying baby made everybody wish that she had stayed at home, it was a certain New York broker who took the child in his arms and walked it up and down and stilled its restlessness. And the woman wondered what he meant when she thanked him and he replied, "I hope you'll never lose him, ma'am; they don't always come back from the dead." She thought the poor gentleman was not quite right in his mind.

But as the long journey came near an end, and in one more day he must leave the stage for the mountain road to Rosita, the anxious time came back again. Would he know his boy at once? Would little Harry know him? Was it even certain that he would find him there, or, if he found him, that a more terrible disappointment

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might not come? He was once more silent and reserved, and the restless eagerness of his eyes showed the repressed excitement within him.

At Montreville he left the stage; he had still ten miles to go. There was no chance of missing the road, and he decided to go on horseback; it would give him an opportunity to be alone, and he wanted time to think of the best way to arrange for the first meeting.

But he couldn't think. It was uphill all the way, and the mountains rose grandly around him, and deep valleys, dark with forests of pine, stretched away on every side, but he did not seem to see them; he had not even ears with which to hear, until the sharp steam-whistle of the Rosita, sounding for six o'clock, came over an intervening hill.

Then he quickened his horse, and was again the keen, steady man of business, and so rode down and dismounted at the company store. "My name is Sherlock," he said. "I am the president of the Rosita Company; please tell the superintendent that I am here."

The superintendent came, and they went together to his house, where they had supper and talked about the affairs of the mine, the chief manager being much surprised at the way the consultation ended. Was there a child any-

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where among the miners? Yes? And the man's name was Jim Peters? Would the superintendent step to the door and point out the exact house? No, he would not trouble him to go along, he had a little private business to attend to, and would be back presently.

He went along the winding road to the house which had been pointed out to him, and, hesitating for a moment, knocked at the door. It was opened by Jim, who looked in surprise at his visitor.

"Is this where Mr. Peters lives?"

"My name is Jim Peters, sir."

Mr. Sherlock gave a searching look at the open, honest face of the man before him, and put out his hand. "My name is Sherlock. I have come to see you on a very important matter, and I would like to have a talk with you."

Jim thought to himself, "He has heard about Kit's mine. Come in, sir," he said aloud; "we can talk in here."

Mr. Sherlock entered and glanced around him; there was no one there but himself and Jim. He took the wooden chair Jim offered him, and sat silent for a few minutes, looking at the fire. Then he turned round and looked straight at Jim, who was waiting for him to begin.

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“Jim,” he said, “I suppose you are usually called Jim? Well, what I want to speak of begins a good way back.” He paused for a moment while the miner looked at him steadily.

“There was once a man who started on a journey with his wife and little boy. They got on a steam-boat at Cairo for New Orleans. But they never arrived there. The steam-boat was wrecked, broken against a bridge, but the parents and all the other passengers were saved; all except the little boy.

“It was believed that he was drowned. The upper half of the wrecked boat was found stranded on the bank of the Mississippi, but no trace of the child was ever discovered. I need not tell you how the parents sorrowed for their only child. They did not even find his dead body; and yet if it had ever been recovered, they would have known it even by the clothes he wore; he had on a little velvet blouse, and a Scotch plaid skirt and stockings.” He paused again. “Did you ever hear of such a child?”

Jim had never taken his eyes away from the face opposite him. His own face had the strained and startled expression of a man who thinks he sees a ghost. He tried to speak, but the voice would not come, and at last there came

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a husky whisper which he did not know was his,—“Kit!”

“Then it *is* Kit? You found him,—*Kit?*”

There was a sudden noise of tramping feet, and voices at the door. “Bless me into the middle o’ next week if ye haven’t walked the legs clean off me, Kit.” And then a child’s laugh in answer. “You ain’t as strong as me, Brick Top, are you?”

The door opened and the two came in, and Kit ran to Jim. “I walked his legs clean off, Jim; an’ I want some supper.”

Jim put his arm around him, and turned him to face Mr. Sherlock, holding him so and waiting. Brick Top put his back against the door, and wiped his sleeve across his mouth. “Well, *I’m* blessed!”

The child looked at the stranger, at first in mere surprise at finding a stranger there, then with a steady, wondering look in his childish eyes, as if the little brain still faintly held the broken threads of recollection.

Mr. Sherlock held out his arms. “Harry, my own little Harry, won’t you come to me?”

Kit looked into his eyes a full minute longer. Then he slowly crossed the room and came close up to him, and his father caught him to his arms, and lifted him on his knee, and held him close.

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“My boy! my own dear boy!”

“Kit,” said Jim, still huskily,—“Kit, yer won’t forgit old Jim?”

And Kit slipped to the floor, and ran across, and jumped into his lap, and hugged him with both arms around his neck. And Brick Top stared at all of them together, and ejaculated with intense conviction,“Well, I am blessed!”

There was no work done at the Rosita next morning.

Brick Top had spread the news overnight, and had interviewed the superintendent and managers, assuring them that every man had sworn he would be on hand to see Kit off.

And every man was there. And while they waited in front of the superintendent’s house they talked of “Jim,” and “Jim’s luck,” for Jim was owner of the “Chimney” Mine, and Brick Top was to be the working partner, and had a check for \$5000 in his pocket to begin on.

And then Mr. Sherlock and Kit and Jim came out upon the steps, and the men cheered themselves hoarse for all three.

And Jim walked beside the buggy all the way up the hill; and when it had reached the top, and the last good-byes had been said, he stood there still. And when, at the foot of the hill

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below him, the road turned off, and the Rosita would be left behind them, Kit leaned out and looked back, Jim was still standing there, waving his hat with one hand and wiping the tears from his honest eyes with the other. But he had promised that he would see Kit again.

A Brilliant Adventure

WE had arrived in Boston that morning on the steamer "Scythia." "We" were myself, unknown to fame as Charley Powers, and my friend Russell Mitford, graduates of the year before from Columbia College, and, after one year's travelling through Europe, glad to find ourselves again at home.

It was a bright June morning as we entered the harbor, whose green islands and forts and red-roofed houses were waking up in the early morning sun; with Nantasket Beach and its hotels and cottages on the left, and in front the city sloping upward from the sea, and crowned with the golden dome of the State House, which burned in the sun as if on fire,—in short, as only Boston harbor can look as you enter it some bright morning from the sea.

We were on the deck, taking in the beautiful scene and agreeing that not even Naples could equal what we saw before us, when Mitford abruptly changed the subject of our thoughts.

"Well, Charley, we will soon be on shore,—and now what's next on the programme?"

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“What do you say to a day in Boston? We can telegraph to Cleveland that we have arrived, and we can start by train to-morrow morning.”

“All right, old fellow, I’m in for anything; and I speak for a tramp into the country around here, if it were only to find that my land legs are in their right places again.”

Now, I was not an “old fellow,” having just turned my twenty-fifth year, and Russell Mitford was only three years my junior.

But he looked much younger than myself; he was tall and well made, and had pulled stroke oar on the crack crew of the “Columbia”—but he had a fine, delicate, high-bred face, smiling brown eyes, and a boyish frankness in his looks and movements which, in spite of the slight moustache which shadowed his upper lip, made him seem much younger by contrast with my graver face and soberer ways.

I had always been “old,” in fact, had been born old, and had deepened into a plain, matter-of-fact individual who had got life’s problems down to an algebraic equation, and who measured all poetry and sentiment with a carpenter’s two-foot rule. But Russell was of another kind. He used to quote, laughingly,—

“Oh, no, my lord,—but then, you see, a star danced,
And under that I was born;”

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and one might easily have believed it, for he had a fund of high spirits which never seemed to flag; and he had, besides, such a way of idealizing,—I cannot exactly describe it, but he often threw such an imaginative coloring over what to me were hard, prosaic facts, that I used to say in reply that he had always lived in his star and had never fairly got into our world.

He was full now of the proposed excursion; and as soon as we had landed and had gone through the customary overhauling and passing of baggage, he led the way up State Street, and did not speak till we were in the street-cars for Cambridge.

“Let’s get out of the city first; I want to get my feet on a good country road, and then we’ll have a swing for it.”

In his own words, I was “ready for anything,” and when at length the car turned past the old Washington elm in Cambridge we got out and looked about us.

“All roads go to Rome; straight ahead, old fellow, and we’ll soon have all the houses behind us.”

But, though the village of Cambridge with its spires and college towers was soon behind us as we swung at a good pace along the road, the houses remained with us. The road was white

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and hard, and on either side, at intervals, and back from the highway, among trees and lawns and gardens, were elegant residences, often half hidden from view by the shrubbery around them.

These grew fewer and farther between as we went onward. On our left were wide fields and meadows, and on our right a strip of woods with large forest-trees, close to the road and inviting in the coolness of their deep shadowy spaces. We seemed at last to have left the civilization behind us, and after a long stretch without a house in view, I was beginning to think that Russell might have been right after all, and that no further sign of human dwelling-place would greet us, when he stopped and pointed through the trees.

“Isn’t that a house in yonder?”

“Where?”

“In there; in the woods.”

We crossed the road and looked over the stone wall which bordered it on the other side, and could make out what seemed a large stone house with old-fashioned gables.

“I’ll bet that’s one of their old colonial mansions, ‘formerly Washington’s head-quarters,’ and ‘with the room the general slept in,’ and ‘the window he looked out of,’ and all the rest of the old times.”

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“Well, what if it is?” I answered; “we will suppose your bet is won, and go on till you find a farm-house for dinner; I’m getting hungry.” And I turned to go off again upon the road.

“Hold on a bit!” And he leaned his arms on the wall.

“Yes, Charley, that’s an old ‘colonial’; and if you were in there you would see the ancient mistress of the mansion coming down the wide stairs in stiff satin gown and silk slippers, and powdered hair set high above her little face; and she would give you welcome in all the stateliness of the dear old Revolutionary grandmothers. I’m going in to see,” he said, suddenly, and, putting one hand on the wall, leaped over it at the word.

“Nonsense, Russell; come on and finish our walk; you’re not in earnest?”

“But indeed I am,” he answered, laughingly. “I’m going to pay my court to the old lady inside here, and if you don’t come you’ll miss a brilliant adventure.” And he began to move forward among the trees.

There was nothing for it but either to wait for his return or to join him in his absurd whim; and, after a moment’s hesitation, I got over the wall and stood at his side.

“There must be a road here somewhere,” he

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said, looking around him; but, as we found out afterwards, the road entrance was at a point higher up on the way we were travelling. So we went on through the trees, and at last came out in front of the house which we had caught a glimpse of from the roadway. A large, old-fashioned stone house of many gables and projecting dormer windows, with a clear space in front, half in lawn and half in flowers; wide stone steps leading up to the door with its great brass knocker,—everything as Russell had imagined it, but no sign of life, except the smoke curling lazily from some chimney in the rear.

We stood and looked at it a while, and then Russell began in the same strain as before.

“Now, this is what I call a real home and a cosey nest to rest in after all my wanderings; but where is the welcome I told you of, and where is the little mistress of the mansion tripping down——”

There was a sudden muffling of his voice as a hand was suddenly placed on his lips from behind, and as suddenly a young girl had her other arm around him and had kissed him on both cheeks, crying out, in mingled tears and smiles,—

“Oh, Russell, I’m so glad! But how could you—why didn’t you?” And then, seeing a third person standing near, and certainly with

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astonishment depicted on his features, she stopped, still half laughing and half crying, but with eyes fixed on Russell's face.

To say that that young gentleman was dumb and transfixed with astonishment but slightly expresses it. His colonial romance had suddenly taken life in a pretty, dark-haired, bright-eyed girl of some eighteen years, who had thrown herself impulsively into his arms, had called him by name, and had welcomed him with kisses to a place on which he had never set eyes before.

"I'm afraid," he began, confusedly, stepping back and blushing to the roots of his hair,— "I'm afraid—there has been a mistake—I—"

"Yes, you dear old boy," the girl interrupted him. "Of course you thought we'd all be here to meet you. But how could you think of not letting us know?" And then she looked at me and held out her hand in a frank, winning way that was irresistible. "This must be the Carl that you wrote us about so much? We will be very glad to know him."

Russell looked at me helplessly.

"I—ahem! I call him Charley, usually."

"Yes, of course," she answered, smilingly, as I took her hand, not knowing at the moment what else to do; "you haven't lost your English language while you were abroad. And you've

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changed a good deal, too," she said, looking again into Russell's face; "but I would know you anywhere. But come into the house," she went on, eagerly; "your room has been ready for you for a week, and——" She was going towards the house, and now stopped and frowned a little, and then, with a look of surprise: "But by what steamer did you come, and how did you miss mother?"

Russell had turned to me and whispered, "The girl is out of her mind. But if she isn't, it will never do to roughly undeceive her now. We'll get out of it some way." And as her last words came to him, he answered, hesitatingly, "We came on the 'Scythia' and got in this morning."

"This morning?" she repeated, in evident surprise; "and on the 'Scythia'? But come in and we'll have the whole story afterwards."

I had a vague notion of breaking for the woods as the best way out of a situation which was momentarily becoming more awkward; but Russell had followed the graceful girl, who was already mounting the steps, and there was nothing to do but to see the end of it. As we entered the hall a fourth actor (or actress) was added to the comedy in the form of a young lady, also very pretty, but a marked contrast to

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our first acquaintance, in having fair hair and blue eyes, as well as being somewhat older. She came forward from a room opening off the hall, and was greeted with delight by our entertainer.

“Oh, Helen, here is Russell and his friend Carl—Charles, I mean; but it’s the same thing.”

The young lady called Helen smiled pleasantly and put out one hand to each of us, giving just one glance at my bearded face and then fastening her eyes on Russell doubtfully.

“Why, Helen, I really believe you don’t know him” (which was very likely, as she had never set eyes on him till that moment).

“I knew him in a minute; and to think of three years making such a difference to you,—and you and Russell such old friends.”

“Oh, I do know him now, of course,” replied Helen, though I still noted a shade of doubt in her voice; “but three years make such a difference.”

“Yes,” said Russell, who felt desperately that he must say something. “Yes—it makes a difference—and” (with a bright look of having at last got some solid ground to stand on)—“I think we had better go to our room.” He made a motion towards the wide stairway as he

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spoke, and I, struck mute by his audacity, followed him.

Our young lady led the way, talking gayly, and throwing open a door in the upper hall, said,—

“There is your old room all ready for you; and when lunch is ready you will hear the bell. Oh, I’m so glad to have you home again!” And she smiled and nodded brightly to us, and the door closed and we were alone.

We stood staring at each other in silence for a moment, and then I, sternly, “Now, Russell, what does all this mean?”

He went to the door and listened, turned the key in the lock, looked all around the room, and then, taking a deep breath, exclaimed, in comical dismay,—

“Blamed if I know!”

“But those girls, the first one especially, seemed to know you.”

“Never set eyes on them before in my life.”

“And why didn’t you tell them so?”

“My dear fellow, what could I do? If you had had that pretty girl’s arms around you, and had seen the delight in her eyes, and she half crying with pleasure.” He threw himself down in an easy-chair by one of the windows and stretched out his legs. “You see, Charley, I

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couldn't be a brute and cover the girl with confusion or worse, after what she had just done; and as far as I was able to think at all, I just thought I'd better go ahead, and we could slip quietly out of it. And then, by George! she knew you!" And he laughed out long and loud.

"And how do you propose to slip out of it?"

"I don't know: get a rope somewhere and climb down through the colonial mansion's window." His eyes twinkled with suppressed fun, and as the ridiculous character of the whole transaction came before us, we both laughed together.

The room which we were in was large and airy and luxuriously furnished. I walked to the window by which Russell was sitting and looked out. It was at the side of the house, and the view was cut off by the nearness of the trees, but just then the two girls passed below, talking earnestly, but in tones too low to be heard.

"There go our two victims," I said; "and by all that's fair, Russell, it's too bad to deceive them."

He looked at me, still smiling. "I rather think that the deceived victims are in this room at present, and I don't know where we could

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find pleasanter or prettier gaolers. But what do you suppose they take us for, or are we in an insane asylum?"

"Nonsense; it's all clear enough. They have been expecting some one—a brother most likely—from abroad, and—"

"And I have arrived unexpectedly," he broke in with a laugh. "But do you suppose a girl wouldn't know her own brother?"

"Not if, as I caught from her words, he had been gone three years. That would make her, I judge, to have been about fifteen when he left; and, besides, you must somehow strongly resemble him. But it's very odd he should have the same name?"

Russell took out a cigar and lighted it. "I suppose I can smoke here? Yes, she has the advantage of me there. I don't know what under the sun *her* name is. But, Charley—Carl, my boy,"—and he shook again with laughter,—“there's a mother expected home, and the father may arrive in a likewise unexpected manner to some of us, and my opinion is that as soon as lunch is over we had better try the road again.”

"And look for some other colonial mansions? If you had taken my advice we shouldn't have got into this scrape."

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“All right, old fellow. And now, if you’ll take mine, I’ll get you out of it.”

Meanwhile the girls were talking as they strolled along the road through the trees.

“It’s the strangest thing, Helen, their coming in the way they did. To have come in another steamer, too, and Russell not to have told us, and to have missed mother, too.”

“It is *very* strange, dear.” She stopped and pushed a little stone with the toe of her boot. “I thought I should have known Russell anywhere; and he did not seem to know me, either.”

“But you forget, dear,” answered the other, eagerly; “Russell was only seventeen when he went to Leipsic, and three years make such a change in a young man. And I think he looks splendid; he has grown so fine and manly.”

“He is *very* quiet,” replied Helen. “I should have thought he would have shown more pleasure at getting home.”

“Now, don’t be jealous, dear. He has been away so long that everything is strange, you know; but he will soon be his old dear self again.”

But Helen still tapped the stone with her

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boot. "His friend did not seem to have a word to say."

"Now, Helen, you are too bad," replied the other, putting her arm about her friend's waist and gently forcing her along. "Carl, or Charley, as he calls him, is a German, and probably does not speak English very well; and, besides, I took them so by surprise. Oh, it was such fun to break in on Russell so! You ought to have seen how surprised they were." And she laughed merrily as she recalled it.

The lunch-bell rang, and surprised us as we still sat and discussed the situation. I was rising to face the mischief as best I could, when Russell laid his hand upon my arm. "Hold on, old fellow! Wait a minute and they will send one to call us, and I'll wager my head I'll get some light on this mystery."

The event proved him right; for after a few moments there came a knock at the door and a gray-haired darky presented himself.

"An old servitor of the family," Russell hastily whispered to me; and then, "I think I know you very well, uncle. You remember me, don't you?" And he put out his hand.

"I don't just 'member you, sah," the old grizzle-headed replied, grinning and bowing in the

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door-way. "I just comed, sah, a month ago yistidday, sah."

"Oh, ah—yes, to be sure; that's what I meant.—What the deuce are you laughing at, Charley?—And—ah—the young lady down-stairs,—the one with the dark hair?"

"Miss Edith, sah? Yes, sah."

"Oh, Edith is it? A pretty name, too," he added, *sotto voce*. "And the father,—Edith's father,—you know?"

The old darky looked his surprise. "Fader, sah? Why, fader's dead years 'gone, sah, and—"

"Of course; I meant he was dead.—Confound it, Charley, what's the matter with you?—What I meant, uncle, was the mother,—the lady that owns the place, buys the things, you know, and all that."

"Yes, sah; Miss Forsythe, sah."

"Hang it! she can't be a 'miss.' I don't mean the one they call Helen. I mean Edith's mother."

"'Zactly so, sah; Miss Forsythe, sah."

"Oh, exactly. Why don't you say what you mean, then? And Mrs. Forsythe, she's away, I believe?"

"Yes, sah, gone to York to meet you, sah."

"All right, uncle, that will do; here's a dollar

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for you." And the old darky went away in open-eyed astonishment to report in the kitchen, "I done b'lieve Mars' Russell gone crazy; done gone forgot his own fader's dead!"

"Now, then," said Russell, as we were again alone, "we've got a clear chart, and all we've got to do is to sail it."

As we reached the hall below, Edith was waiting for us, and led the way to the dining-room. She looked prettier than ever in the white dress she now had on, and as she went lightly on before us Russell whispered, "I'm glad after all that she isn't my sister." I pressed him warningly on the arm, and the next moment we were in the room. Helen was standing by the table and, as we entered an old gentleman turned from the window and came towards us,—

"Ah, Russell, I am glad to see you again."

For an instant Russell looked as if he would bolt and fly for it, and I saw the perspiration gather on his forehead, but Edith came to his relief.

"Why, Russell, you look dazed. This is Uncle Robert, just home from Brazil; don't you remember?" And then, before he could find his voice, the old gentleman kindly patted him on the shoulder.

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“No wonder, my boy, when I haven’t seen you since you were a baby.” And as Russell breathed again, he added, “And this is your friend Mr. ——”

“Oh, yes, sir,—my friend Mr. Powers.”

Uncle Robert took my hand and shook it warmly. “I’m glad to see you, sir.—‘Powers’? that is not a German name, is it?” And he turned to Russell.

That individual looked at me as if he wanted to annihilate my personality then and there, and was muttering something unintelligible about “Powers” and “Bauer” being much the same, when the good angel, Edith, lifted us safely over this new pitfall by bidding us all sit down and discuss lunch first and language afterwards. We went on very well for a little while, though I did not like the look in Miss Helen’s eyes,—they seemed to be watching us; and then a new danger opened under us.

“And how,” said the old gentleman, pouring out a glass of wine, “how did you happen to come to Boston in the ‘Scythia’?”

“To Boston, uncle?” echoed Edith.—“Why Russell, you said you were coming to New York in the ‘Aurania,’ and mother is there waiting for you.”

Russell had recovered his spirits, and was

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expatiating on the lovely scenery about Boston, when this fresh blow came. I could not help smiling, though I got a vicious kick on the shins under the table, and I pretended to be examining the color of the wine against the light as he replied,—

“ Well—I—we—that is—the fact is I had to sail sooner than I thought,—and we thought we would be——”

“ I know,” laughed Edith. “ You wanted to get here to surprise us all, and you got the surprise instead. Confess now that you were surprised.”

“ I was,” said Russell, with the relief and emphasis of getting one thing that he could swear to,—“ was never so surprised in my life.” And he looked at Edith with a glance that was full of much more than brotherhood would have warranted; indeed, he had seldom taken his eyes away from her. She smiled back with eyes full of pleasure.

“ I knew it; I told Helen so,—didn’t I, Helen ?”

“ Yes,” briefly answered that young lady.

“ And, uncle, you will telegraph mother at once, won’t you ?”

“ I have already sent a message into town, my dear. I see by the paper that the ‘Aurania’ got into New York this morning.”

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Russell glanced quickly at me, and as well as eyes could speak I told him that the sooner we were out of this the better.

But my own turn was coming next. Up to this time they had not heard my voice, but now Miss Helen turned to me and said pleasantly, "You and Russell are old friends, I believe?"

"Oh, yes," I said, glad it was something I could answer, and catching at it eagerly. "We have known each other all our lives——"

"That is, you know," broke in Russell quickly, smiling all around the table and giving me another kick in the shins,—"that is, you know, while we were abroad. One gets to think a few years a long time over there, you know," he said, appealing blandly to the interested faces watching his.

"Yes, no doubt," was Helen's answer.—"And do you think you will like this country?" And she turned to me again.

"Very much," I said emphatically. "I never saw a country to compare with it."

"And yet you have only been here to-day!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "You——"

"But you forget that this is Boston," said Russell, rapidly breaking in again, and giving me a look that spoke volumes. "Boston is America, just as Paris is France. You have

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been in Paris, sir?" he asked, turning to his newly-acquired uncle. And he employed all his wit and natural brightness in holding his audience in Paris until lunch was over and we had excused ourselves for returning again to our room.

Once more safe behind a locked door, Russell threw himself on the bed and laughed till he cried. "I thought I was gone," he said, "when the old gentleman came up, and that the darky had lied to me, and I had cold shivers all the rest of the time—with hot spells. Now, old fellow, we must get out of this; but, Charley,"—and he sat upon the side of the bed,—"I'd sooner lose a hand than hurt that little girl. I believe I've lost my heart to her already,—and I didn't mean to deceive her,—I never would have thought of it,—for she is the dearest, sweetest little thing I ever saw."

"Well," I observed, grimly, "you will probably have cause to remember her, for her mother and brother will be here by to-night. As for me, I shall probably be lame for the next fortnight, and all for your 'brilliant adventure'!"

"I beg your pardon, old fellow: but we were on the brink of a precipice, and I hardly knew what I was doing. The one thing now is to get out of this scrape and save that dear little Edith's feelings."

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Down in the parlor, meanwhile, the talk of the morning had been renewed.

“I tell you, Edith Forsythe, there is something wrong. No brother would act as this Russell does, nor look at you so, either, for that matter; and that Carl, or Charley, or whoever he is, is no more a German than I am. Who ever heard of a German who had just arrived speak English so perfectly?”

“But, Helen, dear, there can’t be a mistake. Germans learn to speak English in Germany; and, besides, who ever heard of a man mistaking his own home?” And she laughed triumphantly.

“How do you know he ever thought it was his home?”

“Why, I heard him, dear! I stole up behind them as they were standing before the house, and Russell was saying that this was a real home to rest in after his wanderings, and wondering why the welcome he had told his friend about was not there to greet him, and he was looking for me, and wishing for the little mistress of the house to come tripping down,—and then I couldn’t wait, but just surprised him.”

“Well, my dear, that does stagger me, certainly; and then, as you say, how did he come to be there at all, if he does not belong here? But there is something very queer about it all.”

A BRILLIANT ADVENTURE

“The only queerness is in your own dear self,” cried Edith, jumping up and kissing her; “it’s all because this grand, big Russell does not want to run and play with you, as he used to do before he went away. But come now and we will take them a walk with us, and you can have him all to yourself.”

So it came that while we were still discussing “How to get out of it,” we were summoned by the appearance of the grizzled old darky at the door. He seemed to keep a wary eye on Russell as he backed out into the hall and delivered his message.

“Miss Edith’s complimen’s, and would the gen’lmen like to take a walk?”

“No,” said Russell, hastily—“or—yes, say yes, we will be there in a minute.”

The old darky, eying Russell more suspiciously than ever, withdrew, and the author of our misfortunes turned to me: “We’re in for it, Charley; but maybe we can slip off now through the woods. Never say die, anyway, and our luck will help us out of it. Come on.”

We found the girls waiting for us at the door, and, though Edith’s intentions were plainly otherwise, I found myself walking with Helen, while Russell and Edith went off together.

A BRILLIANT ADVENTURE

The martyrdom which I endured on that walk will never be forgotten. I pride myself on being a particularly candid man, walking a straight road before me, but I'm afraid that a truth-seeker would have found some curious turnings if he had followed my trail that afternoon. Before an hour had passed I was certain I had contradicted myself a dozen times, and this certainty only added to my confusion at each question or suggestion of my companion. "How long had I lived in Leipsic?" "the course of my study there?" my "remarkable proficiency in English," and, especially, "what Russell had told me of his home and friends!" I wished I had never seen this precious "Russell," or that Leipsic was at the bottom of the sea, or that the earth might open and swallow us all together. Once or twice I came very near making a clean breast of it, but the thought of Russell, innocently trusting me and depending on me not to betray him, held me back, and I wiped off the cold perspiration and went on with my tormentor.

How far we went I never knew; we had long lost sight of the couple before us, and when at last we turned and I breathed more freely at sight of the house once more, there were Edith and Russell on the steps laughing and chatting

A BRILLIANT ADVENTURE

together, that arch-culprit as much at his ease, as if he had no dark burden on his conscience, and Edith's eyes brighter than ever with fun as she hailed us.

"Why, what a lovely time you must have had to be away so long! Russell and I have been back for nearly an hour."

"Here's a good place to rest," he called out, as we came near. "Come and sit down, Charley, and I know that Miss Helen will join you."

That young lady did not stop, however, but went in, saying to Edith in a meaning tone as she passed her, "Edith, come in; I want to see you."

But Edith laughingly refused, and the blinded Russell encouraged her, and I gnashed my teeth and scowled at him in vain, as I saw approaching ruin and our last chance of escape going from us.

Three several times I made proposals to go in, accompanied by various masonic signs and contortions of facial muscles, which were meant to imply that we had an enemy within the house and were in immediate danger of discovery. But Russell was clearly infatuated with his new sister, and either would not or could not understand, and I was in constant dread that Uncle Robert would appear with Helen, or possibly with half

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a dozen men-servants, and we should in either case be in a fine predicament.

But no one came. The old gentleman had probably gone out for a drive, or possibly Miss Helen, though suspecting the true state of affairs, was too uncertain of her ground to attempt a disclosure which might be turned in ridicule on herself and lead to a suspicion of her sanity. "What if, after all" (she might have reasoned with herself), "it is just as they say?"

At any rate we were left in peace (if my state of mind could be called anything short of the wildest disorder), and those two hapless beings sat there until a bell within-doors rang for dinner, and we got up from the steps to go in.

I went in last, and I stopped at the door to look about me. The sun had gone down, and the woods around the house made it seem dark already. At least it would be easy to slip out of the house after dinner, and then, if I were ever caught again in a colonial mansion—— I left the rest unsaid and turned and went in-doors.

Here was a new complication. Instead of going upstairs like a reasonable man, where we would have had a chance to put our heads together (all the more necessary after my unfortunate walk that afternoon), Russell had gone direct to the dining-room, where the lamps were

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already lighted and the company waiting for me. There was no longer any use struggling with fate, and I went in.

All the gods of mischief seemed to be in Russell Mitford that evening. He laughed, he told stories, he joked, he gave ridiculous experiences in foreign towns, until even Helen wiped tears of laughter from her eyes, and I was afraid the old gentleman would have a fit of apoplexy.

Edith entered into the fun and helped it on by her own gayety, which seemed to keep pace with that of the wretched trifler sitting opposite ; and in the midst of a special burst of merriment and while I was pitying the revulsion that must come to her young heart, the house suddenly resounded with a violent ringing of the great brass knocker, and I jumped to my feet.

I looked to the door ; but the old gentleman had been sitting next it, and was now standing in the door-way, holding it partly open with his hand. I had thought for a moment of escape at all hazards ; but as I could get out only by knocking Uncle Robert over, I paused and glanced around me.

Helen was still sitting at the table, grasping it with one hand and very pale. Edith was looking at Russell ; and Russell himself had risen from his chair and was standing coolly by

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one of the windows, with his eyes on the partly opened door. In less time than it takes to tell it all this had taken place: the hall-door had been opened by one of the servants, a bustle had followed, in the midst of which we heard a fine, manly voice, and my last hope died as a lady hurriedly embraced the old gentleman, who came first in the way, entered the room, and was followed instantly by a tall young man, whose face (as I could see even in that moment) bore no slight resemblance to Russell's. But there could be no doubt now that the king had come to his own. Helen had half risen from the table with a smothered little cry, and Edith was already in the arms of the stranger. The most astonished person present was evidently Uncle Robert: the poor old gentleman looked first at one and then the other of his supposed nephews, and ended by making a rush at the old darky, who, with eyes wider than ever, was staring in at the door.

The mother, a middle-aged, dignified lady, was by this time conscious of the presence of strangers, and looked to some one to explain; and, as all turned as if by one consent towards Russell, he stepped forward, bowed, and said, gravely,—

“ Madam, we are all alike the victims of an

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unintentional mistake. My friend Mr. Powers"—he bowed slightly again—"and myself had taken the liberty to enter your grounds and admire your home, and, in short, we were mistaken for expected guests, and by an unfortunate complication of circumstances were not at once able to explain. But I assure you, madam, that I am not here under false colors at present; for I took the earliest possible moment to explain our unfortunate blunder to your daughter this afternoon" (here he bowed to Miss Edith, who was standing half encircled by her brother's arm), "and she kindly consented to my remaining *incognito* until I could offer this explanation to yourself in person." And he offered her his card.

The unmitigated villain had allowed me to remain in mental torture for the last two hours!

I have only to add that if any one takes a further interest in what happened, he can call upon Russell and Edith Mitford at their residence on Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, or on Russell and Helen Forsythe at the mansion on the Cambridge road.

The Mexican or the Tiger

THE celebrated story of "The Lady or the Tiger" has always had a special interest for me, because I knew a young man who had really been in a somewhat similar position, and I could understand how Mr. Stockton's young man would feel when he stood before the doors. Only my case was a very much worse one, and it was all fact instead of fiction.

It happened down in Mexico.

I had gone there prospecting among the old abandoned gold- and silver-mines. Three hundred years ago or more the Spaniards had come to Mexico, and after they had killed all the natives who would fight them and had frightened all the rest into submission, they began to hunt for gold and silver. They found some mines which the natives had worked in their rude way and they opened new ones, and as they knew better how to work them and had better tools, they took out large quantities of the precious metals, forcing the poor natives to do all the hard work and to live as slaves without pay.

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But there was a point beyond which the Spaniards could not go. When they had got down to a certain depth the water began to come in and to fill the mine, and they had no pumping machinery with which to get it out again. So they had to abandon them, one after another. And after a while they had to abandon the country itself, as the people once more rose against them ; and the mines, big and little, some of them very deep and full of water, and some of them only half worked, were left behind them.

They remained in that condition, neglected and forgotten, for many a long year : and then at last Americans began to think about them, and a few men who had ventured there came back and told what they had seen, and how it was possible to work them again in American fashion ; and rich men formed companies and bought old mines for next to nothing, and sent down engineers and miners and machinery ; and poor men, who knew something about mining, but did not have any money, went down there prospecting, in the hope of either striking a new mine or finding an old one which they could work in an easy way. And that is how I happened to be in Mexico.

There were four of us, and we had agreed to

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work together and to share whatever fortune we might find. Those of you who have read "Three Times in a Miner's Life" will not be surprised to hear that we did not have much fortune to share,—at least of the money kind. Of the other sort of fortune we had plenty. We risked our lives in examining old mines, for one of us had to be let down by a rope each time to see whether it would pay to work it; and sometimes we were sick, and sometimes in danger from the natives, who were as jealous of us as if we were the old Spaniards come to life again. We had mostly hard knocks and very little to comfort ourselves with. And one day we found ourselves on the west coast, in a dense canebrake, miles long and acres and acres wide, and with only a little dried beef for our breakfast.

It was the last we had, and we didn't know when we would get to the town of Morita, which we were making for, and it seemed as if the canebrake would never end. To understand the situation, you have to know that the canes grow thick and close together and are considerably higher than a man's head. They are tough and strong and as densely crowded as the stalks in a wheat-field, and they would be altogether impassable, except that the Indians and wild animals have made narrow track-

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ways through them, just wide enough for men to go in single file; and these track-ways often cross each other, so that a stranger cannot tell which path to take, and he has to decide as best he can and risk the consequences. It adds to the interest of the situation to know that the canebrake is the haunt of tigers, and that the wrong path may lead to a tiger's lair.

We had struck the canebrake the afternoon before and had followed one of the track-ways till night came on, and then we had cut out a space large enough to sleep in, and had watched, turn and turn about, until morning. The last turn of the watch fell to me, and the other fellows looked so dead tired out as they lay there on the ground that I let them sleep till it was broad daylight and time to push on. Then we got out our little stock of dried beef and chewed away on it, and talked about our chances of being killed by the Indians or starving to death before our journey would be ended. We knew, too, that there were roving bands of half-breeds about that part of the country,—a sort of roving Mexican brigand who would kill a man for the buttons on his coat, and who had a special hatred for foreigners. But we were too well armed to apprehend any trouble from that quarter. Our talk turned chiefly on more

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likely dangers, and it was not a very cheerful conversation.

I took the hopeful view of it. "I tell you what, boys," I said, "we're not in any danger from the Indians. Four men, back to back, with good Winchesters and no shots to fool away are a match for a hundred of them. The main thing is something to eat; and if you fellows will stay here for half an hour I'll slip back on the track we came by and see if I can knock over a bird or something for our dinner."

We hadn't seen a sign of any sort of life the day before; but as I was counted a lucky shot and it would only be the loss of half an hour's time if I failed, they all agreed, and I took my rifle and started back to look for game.

It was very still, dreadfully still and quiet. The wall of canes stood up thick and close on each side, and the air was hot and damp and heavy, and the narrow track-way sometimes turned off so sharp that I could see only a few yards ahead of me. Once in a while I would come to a cross-track; but I had no fear of losing my way. It had rained hard a few days before and the ground was soft and water-soaked, and I could see our shoe-prints all the time before me. But not a sign of any game, not so much as a bird-note in the air or a bird-track on the

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ground, and I was ready to give it up and go back to my companions. "One more trial," I said to myself, "and then I'll go back to them."

I was then standing at one of the cross-ways, and I determined to follow it a little way and see if better luck would come to me; and before I had gone a dozen yards I heard the sudden flutter of a bird's wing and saw a flash of bright scarlet disappear among the cane-tops.

It was too sudden for me to get my gun to my shoulder; but I was certain of getting something now, and I went rapidly and noiselessly onward. I expected every minute to get a sight of another bird, and I kept my eyes on the cane-tops and didn't notice much where I was going; and then all at once my eyes came down and I had another sort of a sight that I hadn't counted on.

Right in front of me an open space had been cut out, like the one I had helped to cut the night before, and five Mexican half-breeds, villainous looking fellows, were half sitting and half lying on the ground.

I had stopped short within ten feet of them, and they were as much taken by surprise as I was. But the next minute they had jumped to their feet and drew their ugly knives, and I knew I was in for it.

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Now, if this were a made-up story, I suppose I should have shot them one after another and have gone back with all their provisions and in a blaze of glory ; but, being a plain man and face to face with five villains who meant murder, and certain that if I dropped one of them the other four would have their knives in me before I could pull the trigger a second time—— Well, I thought about a million years in the instant that I saw their knives flash out, and I turned to run for it.

But even that one instant's hesitation was too much. The Mexicans are quick as cats, and two of them had leaped on me, one seizing my rifle and twisting it out of my hands and the other taking me by the throat. I wrenched myself free from him and struck him with all my might between the eyes, and before the rest could close on me I was running for my life and expecting every moment to be shot down.

The narrow track in which I ran was walled by the cane and I didn't have half a chance ; but I ran like a deer for the turn which I saw ahead, and just as I sheered into it, "Z-zip, crack !" But it missed me, and I only flew the faster. Every time the track turned I knew I had another chance for life, for it hid me for a minute or

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two, and then was my time to put out my best speed; but as I made one of the turns I saw to my dismay that there was a long, straight stretch before me, and I felt that I was doomed. I raced along it like the wind for about a hundred yards, and then brought myself up with a sharp stop. Another track had crossed it at right angles! I didn't know where it led to, but anything would be better than the long stretch ahead. I gave one quick glance back. The foremost villain, gun in hand, had just turned the corner and had covered me with my own Winchester. I knew the "crack!" of it as he missed me again; for before his finger touched the trigger I had darted down the side track and was flying on! I was a good runner, and my only hope was to tire my pursuers out and make them give up the chase, for my footsteps were left in the soft ground, and there was no chance of escape by misleading them as to the way I had gone. I was thinking of this as I ran, and thinking, too, that the new path was a very narrow and winding one, when my heart gave a jump and I came to a full stop again.

There were other footprints there!—broad, large, and fresh,—and going the same way that I was. I had seen marks like them often, and knew them at a glance. They were the unmis-

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takable footprints of a tiger, and he must be very close at hand!

Here was a "circumstance." I stood irresolute, and my hair seemed to rise up as if each particular hair had a life of its own. Whether to turn back to be shot to death by the villains coming up behind or to go to be torn to pieces by the savage brute in front? The Mexican or the tiger?

I don't pretend that I wasn't scared. I was worse than scared, I was mentally paralyzed; and I stood there, helpless and bewildered, as if my feet had suddenly turned into lead and couldn't move.

The narrow track-way had taken a sharp curve just there, and I was standing on the bend of the curve and could see only a little way in front and behind me; and before I could think of what to do, I heard a low, heavy growl just ahead, and I knew that the tiger was coming. There wasn't a moment to lose, and, more by instinct than by thought, I flung myself on my face, resting my face on my arms.

I will never forget the sensation of coming death and that awful waiting for the end. I heard the soft "pat-pat" of his heavy paws, and though my eyes were closed and I scarcely seemed to breathe, I could *see* the great beast as

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he stopped close over me, and I felt his hot breath on my neck as he sniffed and purred and growled over his prize. Then a heavy paw came down on my shoulder and the sharp claws went through my hunting-shirt like knives. He was going to turn me over and find out what kind of thing I was.

And then I knew that something had happened; for the claws let go of my shoulder and two heavy paws came down at once on my back, and there was a low, fierce growl, that rose into an angry roar, and was met halfway by a human cry of terror and the sharp crack of a rifle, and in the same moment the weight was gone from my shoulders, and I heard a rush through the air and the crash of a heavy fall, and as I sprang to my feet I saw that the foremost Mexican was down and the terrible tiger snarling over him.

Run? Why, I never ran in my life as I ran then. If there had been anybody there to time me, I would have broken all the records that were ever made. I never knew where I went or where I turned. Every thought of my brain and every nerve of my body were strung to the one blind purpose of getting away. I must have run a good mile before I slackened my pace, and even then I would stop and listen and

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think that I could hear the tiger leaping after me. But nothing but my own footsteps broke the stillness as I hurried on, and I had gotten over caring for any game. I had had enough of hunting for one day, and had nothing but a lost rifle and a bleeding shoulder and scared wits to show for it.

The next day at sundown, more dead than alive, for I hadn't had a thing to eat, I joined my companions at a hacienda near Morita. They had waited for me in the canebrake for an hour or more, and then, supposing that I would follow and catch up with them, they had gone ahead.

Two years afterwards, in a snug room, with my feet to the fire, I read Mr. Stockton's story of "The Lady or the Tiger?"

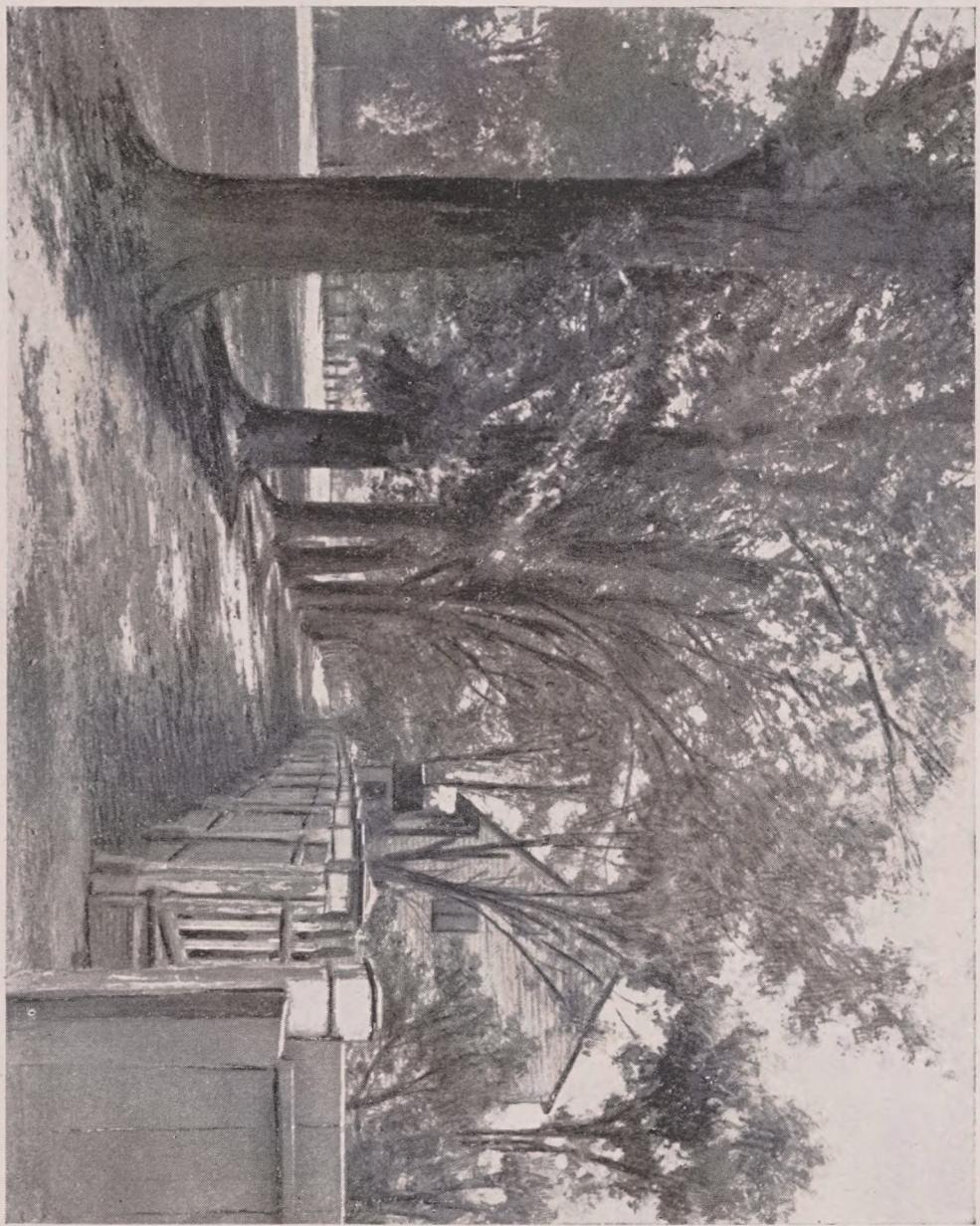
And when I had finished it I lay back in my chair and thought of a certain canebrake in old Mexico and of another young man who had found himself in a tighter place than the hero of the story. I hope that my unknown brother of fiction got out of his scrape as well.

The Mystery of Hampton

THE village of Hampton was strangely stirred in the good year 1693.

Any one who knows it as it is now, in this year of our Lord 1893, would think it must have required something very unusual to disturb the quiet of that ancient town.

It lies at the eastern end of Long Island, on the Atlantic shore, and about a mile back from the sea. Its one long street is lined on both sides by great tall elms and by gray, moss-covered, shingled houses, with an old, weather-beaten windmill at either end of the street, and a graveyard, with rudely shaped gravestones sinking out of sight among the long grass, in front of each windmill. No railway has yet broken in upon its steady, old-fashioned ways. In its grassy lanes and hedges, its quaint little-windewed homes, its people of unmixed Puritan blood, and even in the tooting of the stage-coach horn as the ancient vehicle comes down the village street, it belongs to the past; and the noisy forces of the present are held off from it, as its sand dunes by the shore keep off the sea.



MAIN STREET, EAST HAMPTON, L. I.

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The cows go slowly down the street to pasture every morning and come back slowly every night; the geese waddle lazily to the goose-pond by the upper graveyard, and even the sails of the old windmills turn sleepily round and round, and it is as quiet every day as if the houses, too, were gray, wooden gravestones, inscribed in moss upon their shingled sides :

“BORN OF PURITAN SETTLERS, 1639.

“A town ‘to fortune and to fame unknown !’ ”

And yet it has memories.

In that house with the long roof on one side sloping almost to the ground, John Howard Payne spent his boyhood; and no doubt it was to this little village by the sea that his thoughts had gone back, when out of his troubled life he one day wrote his immortal “Home, Sweet Home!” In the old academy, built of yellow bricks brought over from Holland, his father had taught school. In the old church, with its straight, high-backed pews and old-fashioned pulpit, Dr. Lyman Beecher began his ministry. And wasn’t it from the old house on the little hill at the end of the village street that Dame Hedges had flung the pudding at the British soldiers in old Revolutionary days and so had christened it to all generations as “Pudding Hill”?

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The old gray houses could tell more than one such tale; and the cedar chests in the old garrets under the pointed roofs could bring out quaint bridal dresses and veils and high-heeled slippers, once gayly worn by those whose names have almost faded from the rough-cut stones in the old graveyards. But nobody thinks much about these things. They are accepted as simple facts and left to take care of themselves: of no more interest to these quiet people in the year 1893 than the old notice which was once posted on the little town hall in 1649:

“Ye man which shall first give cry of a whale off shore, shall be paid the sum of One Shilling lawful coin of ye realme.

“BY ORDER OF YE TOWN MEETINGE.”

Even in those old days the village was as quiet as it is now. In the spring of 1693 the men tilled their farms and the women sat at spinning-wheels and spun; and the cows went down the street to pasture, and the geese waddled to the pond, and the houses were beginning to grow gray, in keeping with the slow and uneventful life around them.

But in that year something had happened!

Bill Stokes said he had seen it.

“I did,” said Bill; “I seen it with these

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eyes! There wasn't no moon; but the night was clear an' the stars were shinin', an' I reckon I ain't blind! I was comin' up from Jericho, an' was walkin' along, thinkin' of nothin'."

"You usually *is* thinkin' of nothin', ain't you, Bill?" interrupted one of his listeners, with a wink to the others. But the laugh that followed was faint and uneasy, and one of the men replied,—

"Never you mind, Ned Brown. Let Bill tell his story."

It was the regular custom at Hampton for a certain number of the men to assemble at the one store of the village every evening; and there, sitting on boxes and on the counter, or lounging about in the easiest position they could find, to smoke their pipes and to talk over such small events and village gossip as came uppermost, or to "calculate" on what news of the outside world the next weekly stage-coach might bring.

The usual group had gathered on this evening, and the one lard-oil lamp which hung from the ceiling threw into half light and half shadow the eager looks and expectant attitudes of the men, and showed that a subject of uncommon interest had come before them. Bill Stokes was standing in the middle of the floor, and, after

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the momentary interruption had ceased, continued his story.

"I was walkin' along, as I says, an' when I come to the graveyard, betwixt it and the mill, I thought as how I heard somethin' breathin' hard. I was whistlin' to myself, easy like, an' I stopped an' listened. The breathin' kept on, in sorts of puffs an' snorts like, an' then it stopped an' there was a growlin' kind of sound. I could see the head-stones an' the grass; an' I jes' thought to myself, 'Somebody's critter has strayed loose an' got in there,' an' I went across the road an' looked over the fence. An', as I'm livin', a thing that looked like a man all in black, with a red cap on his head an' a black beard all over his face, rose up among the graves! An' at that minute somethin' white came at me over the fence, an' took me in the breast an' knocked me over on my back,—an' I don't remember nothin' more till I was standin' in my own house, wet with sweat an' tremblin' all over!"

There was a circle of awed faces around him in the dimly-lighted store as he ended, and even Ned Brown's voice had none of its usual joking flavor as he asked, "Are you sure you didn't have a drop too much down at Jericho, Bill?"

"Not a drop, much or little!" Bill answered.

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"I was as sober as a judge, an' there ain't no mistake in what I tell you. I seen it, an', what's more, I *felt* it. A mule's hind leg wouldn't have knocked the wind out o' me more completely."

The evidence was too exact and circumstantial to be denied. And in the pause which followed every one visibly started when a man merely knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the box on which he was sitting, nor did it reassure them when he half whispered to the man nearest him that "he had known them as had seen spirits walk, an' somethin' always happened afterwards. There wasn't no good in it, nohow!"

"There's them three drownded sailors that come ashore from the wreck ten year ago," said Dan Silvus, a fisherman; "but I reckon them poor chaps is lyin' quiet enough?" His remark was put half questioningly, and Bill replied,—

"It wasn't none o' them. I mind seein' them when they was washed ashore, an' they was little men an' had blue shirts an' duck trousers on. What I seen was big an' black, an' his eyes was bright an' glarin', but I didn't more'n see him, when I was knocked flat an' didn't wait for no more."

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"What time o' night was it?" asked Ned Brown.

"'Bout eleven o'clock, or mebbe later, I'd been down at Jericho, keepin' company with widder Hunter, an' it must have been nigh onto midnight when I was comin' home."

The men exchanged glances and nodded to each other; midnight was the time for ghosts and witches to be abroad!

"I'm not sayin'," resumed Bill, "that if I'd been thinkin' of dead folks I mightn't have mistook a shadder or a bay-berry bush for some-thin' livin' or dead, but I wasn't thinkin' of nothin', an' it come on me unexpected,—let alone havin' a sore breast to keep me from forgettin' it. Blamed if I ain't been expectin' to see it again all evenin'!" He glanced uneasily as he spoke into the dark corners of the store, and more than one pair of eyes looked furtively over shoulders that were conscious of a cold shiver creeping down the spine.

"I never heerd tell," said a man sitting back in the shadow, "of a black ghost afore."

"No more did I," said Dan Silvus. "They come mostly in white, 'cordin' to all accounts I ever heerd; though if one o' them drownded sailors 'd come in the rig he was buried in, we couldn't blame him,—seein' they didn't have no

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shrouds. But this here one o' Bill's beats me." And most of those present agreed that it was contrary to all recorded ghostly appearances.

"All in black, an' with a red cap on his head?" repeated one who had not yet spoken. "Mebbe it was the devil?"

"What would the devil be doin' in a Christian graveyard?" was the answering problem of a man sitting on a soap-box on the floor with his elbows on his knees and his chin resting on his hands. And this last uncanny question seemed to open so many dreadful possibilities that, without discussing it any further, the group broke up and the men went to their several homes to spread the tale.

By the next day it was the talk of the whole village. The men had no other subject as they met each other on the street or on their way to their farms. The women repeated it to each other across the fences of the backyards, or invented errands in order to discuss it with their neighbors; the children retold it on their way to the village school; even the stage-coach, coming down the long street with the driver blowing his tin horn, did not arouse a passing interest in its usually exciting arrival. There was nothing to be thought of but "Bill Stokes's ghost."

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The story was partly believed, partly doubted. Those who doubted were in the majority when the graveyard lay there in the light of day, as quiet and peaceful as it had been any time in the last sixty years. The plain, gray headstones, "Sacred to the Memory" of the "Susannahs" and "Priscillas" and "Samuels" and "Hezekiahs" who had worshipped in the old meeting-house under the elms and had gone to their rest, seemed to protest against even the thought of any diabolical intrusion, and the grave of the first minister of this old-time Puritan colony, who had been buried at one end of the graveyard, with his head to the west, so as to face his flock at the resurrection-day and to see that no one was missing, was like a grim sentinel to keep the peace of this hallowed ground. But when evening had come, and the shadows fell, and the low thunder of the surf upon the shore came fitfully on the wind, the believers increased in number. There were unnamed possibilities among the sleeping places of the dead folk in the still, dark hours, and neither believers nor doubters ventured to pass that graveyard after night had come, but left it to the care of the windmill, which stretched its gaunt, naked arms to the sky.

There was one exception. Dorothy Law-
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rence, the miller's daughter, was not even a doubter,—she was a total disbeliever in the tale.

“I do think,” said one gossip to another, recounting a visit paid to the miller's house on the all-absorbing topic, “that if you was to shove a ghost into her face, she'd look at you in that stony way of hers and not feel her heart beat any faster.”

“Dorothy Lawrence's heart!” rejoined the other scornfully. “You mean the bit of her father's millstone she carries in place of it! She never had no heart. Ask Ned Brown and Abner Milford what they think of her? That woman is stone clear through.”

As she sat that day in her little room with its eyelet of a window under the sloping roof of the little house close by the mill, she did not look like stone, but warm flesh and blood. Dorothy Lawrence was twenty-eight years old, and ten years before there was not a fairer girl between East River and Montauk Point than the miller's daughter. Even then, when she had only turned her eighteenth year, her Puritan ancestry had given a sober quietness to her face, a sedateness to her step, and a simple, truthful directness to her speech, which made one think her at first to be older than she was, but which only added a

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quaintness to the fresh young figure which went down the village street or sat in the old church with pure, wide-open eyes that seemed to be drinking in the long sermon to its final word. .

The young men who took their places in the back seats of the church, and who hung awkwardly about the door or on the steps outside when the service was over, had regularly more than one challenge or wager among themselves in those days as to which of them should see Mistress Lawrence home. But, as she would come down the aisle with her sweet, pure face and dainty step, and the distant adoration of her admirers changed into the possibility of actual touch and speech, their hearts as regularly failed them, and time after time they had it only to jibe each other for allowing "that Dick Roberts" to coolly step in and carry off the prize. And the older people whispered and shook their heads in grave disapproval at sight of the same thing, and wondered that Miller Lawrence, who was reputed a careful and godly man, should allow his fair young daughter to bestow her favor on such a ne'er-do-well worldling. For it was not only after church on a Sabbath evening, but in many a walk along the street, and often in the miller's home, that Dick Roberts was at her side.

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He was a year older than herself, a tall and handsome lad, who might have passed for over twenty years, the only son of the sternest deacon of the Hampton church and firmest upholder of the faith and ways of the Fathers. The iron face and frame of the deacon might have marched in the ranks of the old Roundheads of Cromwell, and he saw with fear and set the straight lines of his mouth the harder against the follies and vanities which were creeping into the once godly settlement. And the one great trial of his life was this son, Dick, whom he had wrought with in private and prayed over in public, until almost the entire community had come to look askance upon the lad as being in some vague way under the power of the Evil One.

It puzzled Dick himself to know why. He was frank and fearless by nature. He had stood easily at the head of the village academy, winning prizes in everything with an ease that surprised himself, and invariably giving them away with careless good nature to others who had worked harder to secure them. But, unfortunately for him, his quick apprehension and original ways of thinking upon all subjects were not looked upon with favor by the conservative, slow-moving minds around him, and

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his outspoken and often derisive criticism of doctrines held to be fundamental, and his apparently defiant way of breaking through customs and traditions which had been hammered in with every nail of every shingle in the little town, only increased the condemnation which he was already under as one who had fallen from grace and belonged to the children of this world.

Unfortunately for him, too, he had a quick sense of the ludicrous, which not even the solemn surroundings of a church meeting could subdue, and which had led him more than once into what was grievously regarded as unseemly levity. At one such meeting he had smiled at a pointed and public allusion to himself as "one who goeth even unto strange towns and mingleth in the dances of the ungodly!" And when the speaker at once wrathfully and unmistakably indicated the culprit with his finger, the young man rose up and took his hat and strode out with such a look of scorn upon his face that it removed the last doubt as to his condition as a hardened sinner.

"I won't stand it, Dorothy," he said, hotly, as they stood together near the mill on the following evening. "I've held my head up and made believe that it was all fun to me and that

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I didn't care. But for a whole year my heart has burned inside me like a fire, and I'd have knocked the heads of the fools together before now if—if it hadn't been for——” There was the trembling of angry tears in his voice, and the girl put her hand upon his arm.

“Come, Dick. Let us go and sit a little while in the old place. I want to talk to you.”

He went with her willingly, and they sat down together on the steps of the stile which formed the primitive entrance to the graveyard, he on the step below and looking up at her. There was a pleading wistfulness in the eyes which looked down on his in turn.

“Oh, Dick, why will you do these things?”

“Never mind that now, Dorothy. I don't care for anything when I can look into your eyes.”

“But you shouldn't say that, and I must mind it, Dick. Why do you set people against you so, and such good people?”

“*Good* people!” he answered, with angry scorn rising again into his face, which he lowered from her steady gaze. “They are a hard, unfeeling lot of heartless fanatics, and their religion is as narrow as themselves.”

“They are good and honest-meaning people,” the girl answered, calmly; “and their religion

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is what they have received from their fathers. Then you did go to the dance at Sag Harbor?"

"Go? Of course I did. I'd go again tomorrow. There's no more harm in it than skating on the pond in winter."

"But if our people think it sinful, Dick?"

"Oh, I can't stop to ask them every time I eat and drink," he answered, impatiently. "It has been just the same always. They sent me away from Sabbath-school because I asked questions and wanted to understand things for myself, and now, because I don't believe as they do, and choose instead to think and act in my own way, they treat me as if I were possessed of the devil. I sometimes wonder," he added, bitterly, "when *you* will turn against me, too."

"I will never turn against you, Dick," she said, gently, as his eyes again looked up into hers. "We have been friends too long for that ever to be."

"Friends?" he echoed. "Is it never to be anything but 'friends'? Dorothy, you *must* let me speak of it again. I've loved you ever since I was old enough to know what love means; it's only my love for you that has kept me in this place, and I love you better every day. Why won't you tell me that you love me? Tell me now, Dorothy; tell me that you will

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marry me some day!" And his handsome, boyish face was lighted up with the love-light in his eyes.

She looked down at him, and there was a meaning in that look and in the sudden quickening of her breath, which he was blind not to have seen, but he only saw the steady gaze he knew so well, and heard the quiet, steady tones,—

"You know that cannot be. You know I promised father that I would never let you say a word that would make us anything but friends until he gave me leave. Let us be friends always, Dick."

"No," he answered. "I'm not a boy any longer, and I have a right to know." He got up as he spoke and stood before her, and the proud and masterful spirit of the young fellow showed itself in every line. "Tell me this, then. If you were free and could do as you willed, would you say Yes? Would you marry me then?"

Was it herself or was it a century of Puritan blood and training which answered him? The voice was low, but it was clear and steady.

"I would say No. I do not think I could marry any one I was not sure of,—any one who did not love the only religion and the only way of life I've ever known. You must not ask me.

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Oh, Dick," and her voice broke down a little, "let us still be friends; we can be friends always."

He looked at her gloomily. Then he put out his hand to help her off the stile. "I see," he said, as if talking to himself, "it won't be long till you are like the rest of them. Let us go home."

She took his hand without a word, and they went back to the house together, and he left her at the door.

On the next Sabbath evening Dick was not at church. She knew that for the last two years his regular presence in his father's pew was due entirely to something far remote from the teaching which he heard there, but this evening his place was empty. So that she was surprised when he met her at the door and claimed her, and in the unexpected pleasure which it gave her, she drew her arm more closely into his.

But Dick was strangely silent and unresponsive, and her faint attempts at drawing him into his usual gay and careless vein met with such brief answers that she soon ceased, and they walked on in silence. Others passed them, or walked behind or before them, and Dorothy knew that they would have their say about the companying of these two, and she did not care.

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The stragglers thinned and dropped off by twos and threes as they reached their different homes, and now there was no other house between them and the mill,—and they were alone together. As they reached the mill, Dick stopped and drew his arm from hers and stood confronting her.

“It’s the last time, Dorothy. I needn’t tell you what I’ve often told you before, but I must have an answer to-night. Will you promise to marry me some time?”

The sky was overcast with clouds, and the only light was from the miller’s window, and it streamed out faintly on the grass where they stood. She turned her head and looked at it, and her voice was very low as she replied,—

“Don’t, Dick; please don’t. It only hurts us both; and you know I have given my promise.”

“I don’t care about that,” he answered, and his voice was hard and dry. “I must have your promise to *me*. And I must have it now or you will never see me again.”

“You are going away?” she asked, surprised.

“Never mind,” he answered. “What I want is to know that you will marry me now or never.”

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“I cannot,—you know I cannot tell you that; I ought not to let you ask me.”

“Tell me,” he insisted; and he took both her hands in his.

She did not resist, but she stood straight and firm before him. “I—cannot!”

He held her for a long minute without speaking. Then he dropped her hands and turned and went away.

That was ten years ago. It seemed to Dorothy Lawrence as she sat at the little window on this summer afternoon as if it had been ten centuries. She could hear the creaking of the great arms of the windmill as the tightly-stretched sails carried them ceaselessly round and round; she could see the graveyard across the road with its silent memories of the dead, and the stile which her feet had never pressed since an evening long ago; she could see, far off, the sand-dunes at the shore, and every now and then the tumbling thunder of some heavier wave was carried to her on the wind. And she saw and heard. But, in her fixed gaze and motionless attitude, she seemed to see and hear them as if they were the phantasms of a dream.

One hand was on her lap, and the fingers were half closed upon a single sheet of letter-paper which lay open with some verses written over it.

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He had put it into her hand one evening as they parted at her father's door, and she remembered the half jest and half bitterness with which he had told her to keep it: "You won't understand it, Dorothy; you're too high above such things. But don't show it to any one else; I'm low down enough in their good graces already." She did not need to read it over now. She knew the simple verses, she knew every turn of every letter of the words which kept coming and going as she sat there with the paper in her hand.

"Summer days by Hampton's sea,—
Youth and laughter, gay and free :
Storm and winter on the sands,
Breaking hearts and parted hands.
Read my riddle, maid, to me.

"Glimpse of sea through broken dune,
Foam-crests touched by Harvest moon :
Signal-gun across the wave—
Toll of bell by open grave :
Here and there, by land and sea.
Read my riddle, maid, to me.

"Arms of windmill 'gainst the sky,—
Love and Youth go strolling by :
Trees that shiver in the blast
Of the snow-wind sweeping past :
Snows and flowers together lie."

And she heard him say again in the old half-

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bitter and half-jesting tone, "You won't understand it, Dorothy!"

On the third evening following that on which Bill Stokes had told his mysterious adventure, the regular loungers at the store had been reinforced by several additions to their number, and the talk had turned to the inevitable subject.

An old, white-haired man, Elijah Musgrave by name, was speaking.

"Ye may well say that Deacon Roberts believed in them. He did. I've heerd him say it wasn't against Scriptur', for there was the witch of Endor to prove it. An' when his son, Dick, says, 'Father, I don't believe it; I believe that like as not the old witch lied when she said that she saw Samuel's ghost, and you've only got the witch's word for it!' Well, well; mebbe the deacon was too hard on the boy, an' tryin' to convert youngsters with a stick ain't exactly the means o' grace which the Scriptur' tells of."

"Dick never came back after he ran away, did he?" asked one of the younger members of the party.

"No," replied the old man; "he never came back, an' the deacon died without seein' him."

"Joined Captain Kidd's men," said Ned Brown, briefly.

"J'ned Cap'n Kidd," repeated Elijah. "I

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seen the letter,—the deacon showed it to me. ‘Father,’ it says, ‘I’ve gone to sea—along with Cap’n Kidd,’ it says—‘an’ I don’t think you’ll miss me, for I was never any good to you.’ An’ the old deacon was all broke up by it, an’, as the sayin’ is, went sorrowin’ to his grave.”

“Dick was a wild chap,” said one. “I knowed him, an’ he was that reckless that he was ready for anything.”

“Reckless he was,” answered Elijah; “but he had a tender spot in him, too, only he always flared sort of away from it. I mind me one day how he said, sittin’ by the mill foreninst the graveyard, ‘If ever I’m buried,’ he says, ‘I want to be buried in there: I couldn’t lie peaceful,’ he says, ‘unless I’d be with the folks I’ve known, an’ have the old windmill near me.’ Dick was a queer chap; an’ I misdoubt if we rightly understood the boy.”

“Talkin’ of Kidd,” said a bushy-whiskered man sitting on the counter; “I was over at Sagg this morning, and I heard as how his schooner has been off and on Gardiner’s Island for a week or more.”

“Buryin’ treasure, I reckon,” said another; “they say he sinks his money-chests somewhere in the sand along the point of the island. It’ll be fine huntin’ for ‘em one of these days.”

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“The cap’n stands in with the folks on Gardiner’s,” said the bushy-whiskered man. “Leastways, I’ve seen them as says they’ve seen the rich silks and stuffs that he trades for provisions and things for his men.”

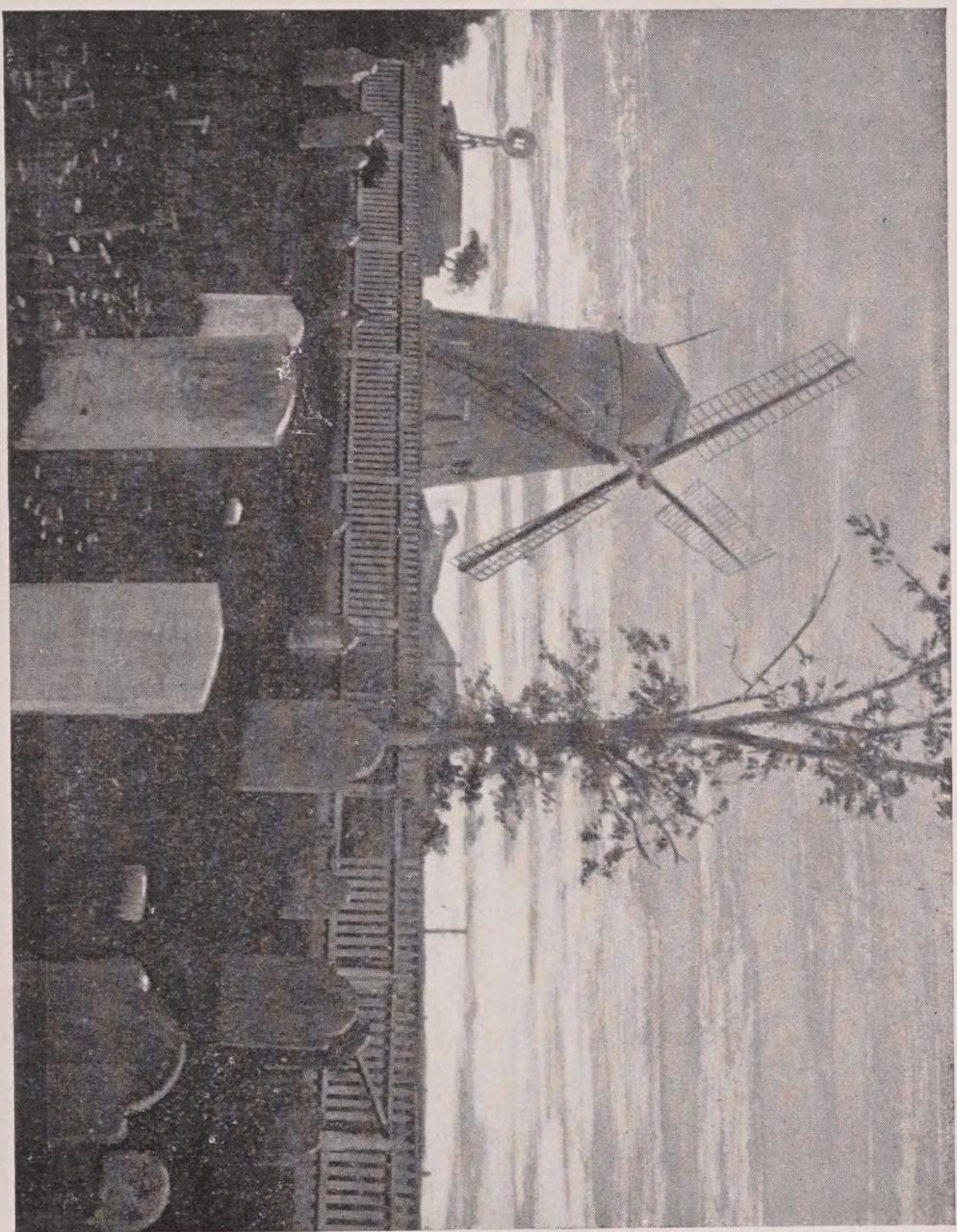
“‘Trades’?” echoed another. “It’s apt to be easy tradin’, when you’re offered a bit of silk with one hand an’ a bullet with the other. I calculate I’d trade quick on them terms!” And he looked around at the rest, who nodded approvingly.

“But he needn’t give them nothing, unless he has a mind to,” said Dan Silvus; “an’ I reckon it shows somethin’ good about the cap’n, after all. They say that even the devil isn’t as black as he’s painted.”

The talk kept drifting off in this way to other things,—to boats and nets and wrecks and fishing,—and it had such a cheering effect that, when the time for going had arrived, and the party broke up for their homes, the mysterious midnight apparition had faded for the moment from their minds.

But the next day, and for many a day after, they and many others talked wonderingly and sadly of what had happened on the night that Bill Stokes had seen the ghost.

There was to be a burial in that graveyard in



THE OLD GRAVEYARD, EAST HAMPTON, L. I.

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the afternoon, and all the villagers who could be at home were there in attendance. The simple rites were soon ended, and some had already left the place, when they were called back by the exclamations of a few who had gone wandering among the graves and by the sight of others running to the spot.

Within a few feet of the fence was a new-made grave, with the earth still fresh upon it; and in the centre of the mound was a piece of paper, with some characters scrawled upon it in pencil, and fastened by a sailor's knife, which had been stuck through it into the earth.

As calmly as if she were lifting a withered leaf from the ground, the woman whose heart was "like a millstone" took up the paper and read it, and then Dorothy Lawrence fell senseless beside the grave.

This is what was written :

"We don't know his right name, but he wanted to be buried here, nigh the windmill. If we haven't done as he wanted, it's because it had to be done at night, and it's the best we know how."

There was no name signed to the paper.

Cap'n Johnsion, of Bermuda

"CAP'N JOHNSIN, yes, sah; jes' call me dat,—Cap'n Johnsion."

He was standing at the bottom of the narrow stone steps which led from the wharf down to the water. A battered straw hat, with a freshly-plucked rose and two chicken feathers stuck in a hole in the side of it, was on his close-cropped woolly head; a bright-red, sleeveless jersey was belted at his waist with an old suspender, and his patched canvas trousers were turned up above his bare black feet, over which the green water of the rising tide was plashing.

A little sloop yacht, decked forward of the mast, was moored to a stone post close by, and we were standing on the steps higher up, and had just concluded a bargain for a day's sail.

We had arrived at the islands a week before, Nellie and I. Her health had failed, and she had been compelled to give up her work. As the winter came on she grew worse, and the doctors had said at last that she must leave New York. They recommended Bermuda; so

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we had come to the islands,—Nellie, her mother, and I,—and with the change and the warm air and the loveliness all about us, at the end of the first week she had been able to go out for a little walk.

We were strolling along the wharf on the lookout for a boat, when this singular boatman accosted us,—

“Nice day fo' a sail, sah; jes' de right wind, an' de boat all ready.”

“Is that your own boat?”

“Oh, no, sah; dis is a hired boat, but I sail her. It's all right, sah; I'se sailed dese waters, man an' boy, for years. An' de boat can go, sah; jes' shake out de canvas an' get all her clothes on, an' dere ain't no boat round here can take no wind outer *her* sails!”

I am an artist by profession, and accustomed to seeing queer models, but a more strikingly unconventional figure I had never seen. From the torn straw hat, so oddly set off by the rose and feathers, and from the bare black arms and the red woollen jersey down to the black feet that kept moving in the waves which were plashing over the step on which he stood, he was certainly one of the oddest beings I had ever come across.

“And what is your name?”

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"De 'Mermaid,' sah. I don't know rightly what it means, sah, but some gen'l'men dey tells me it's a kind o' sea sarpint. She do go like all snakes sometimes!"

He chuckled merrily at his joke.

"But I meant your own name," I said. "What name do you go by?"

He drew himself up with a certain dignity.

"Oh, I took yo' meanin' fo' de boat, sah. Cap'n Johnsion, yes, sah; jes' call me dat,—Cap'n Johnsion."

He bore about as much resemblance to a regulation "captain" as he did to a mermaid, and his appearance was so comically at variance with his air of dignity and the emphasis he put on "cap'n" that Nellie broke into a merry laugh.

"Dat's right," said the captain. "I likes to see de young lady happy. Heaps o' trouble in dis world, an' we need all de smiles we got. Reck'n you'll go, sah?"

I think that last remark decided me. "Yes, captain, we'll go," I said, and turned to the girl at my side. "Come on, Nellie; I think the 'Mermaid' will do."

As I took my seat with Nellie in the stern of the boat, the captain ran up the jib and made it fast, and was back at the tiller and letting

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the main-sail out with a run. It was done so quickly that I was hardly seated before the yacht was lying over before the wind, and "Cap'n Johnsion" sitting as quietly as if he had been there a week, and chuckling to himself.

Here at last were the Bermudas! Low islands covered with cedar, and with their coral bases cut into grotesque carvings and hollows and mimic caves by the play of the water; now so near one another that a pebble might be tossed from one to the other, and now scattered apart over the waters and dotting a beautiful bay; here only a gray, weather-beaten rock just lifted above the waves, and now one large enough to hold a solitary tree; and now the snow-white roof of a house and a glimpse of its cream-colored coral walls through the cedars and palmettos.

Beneath, as you sail through ever-opening vistas of new beauty, is the wonderful, changing-hued malachite green of the water above its white coral bed, and you lean over the boat and see the branches of coral twenty and thirty feet below. Presently the sunlight strikes through it and sends a rose-light to the heart of the liquid malachite sea.

We were in the little open bay formed by Hamilton Island on one side and Ireland Island,

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curving around almost to meet it, on the other. The wind was a trifle stronger, coming in from the open sea, but the air was soft and warm, and there was not a cloud in the clear blue sky. The light-house on Gibb's hill stood out above the dark green of the cedars like a great pillar carved in snow.

Nellie was sitting to leeward, with one hand playing in the water, which the lay-over of the boat brought near enough to touch, and it was good to see the color coming back to her cheek and the brightness to her eyes.

Captain Johnson produced a large conch shell from the cuddy, and putting his lips to the smaller end, in which a hole had been roughly drilled, sent out a deep, mellow, booming note over the waters,—for no other reason apparently than to make sure that the shell still retained its vocal power.

He was plainly satisfied with the result.

“De angel Gabr'l glad to have horn good's dat!” he remarked, softly, as he put it back under the seat. Then he began to sing,—

“To die no mo',
To die no mo',
I'se goin' home to die no mo'.”

He was leaning back and crooning the words

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over to himself, and I joined in on the last line of the refrain.

He looked at me curiously. "You ain't a 'ligious man, sah?"

"Well," I replied, taken somewhat aback, "I don't profess to be especially religious, but—"

"I knowed it, sah, ho! ho!" and he put down his head and chuckled with evident satisfaction. "I knowed it jes' to look at you, sah. Fust time I look at yo' face I say to myself, 'Dere ain't no 'ligion in *dat* man.' I jes' knowed it, ho! ho!"

I was too much astonished at this reference to my want of a religious aspect even to answer Nellie's peal of laughter, and before I could find a fit rejoinder to the captain's power of observation, he had begun again.

"I don't count fo' much in 'ligion myself. Jes' you do what's right an' good, an' tell de truf an' don't steal an' dem tings, an' dere ain't nothin' goin' to hurt you."

"Why do you wear that rose in your hat, captain?" Nellie asked.

He took off his battered head-piece and looked at it, and then put it on again. "Dere's somethin' nice 'bout a rose, miss; I al'ays liked 'em. An' dem fedders was off'n a chicken I

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used ter have, but he got acciden'ly killed. I used ter tink a heap o' dat chicken, an' I war mighty lonesome when he died. He war de bestest fight'n' chicken in B'muda." He put his head down on his breast in his queer way and laughed softly to himself. "Ho, ho, jes' so; de gamiest fight'n' chicken in B'muda!"

We had left the islands behind us. To the north St. George's was outlined in bluish haze, and the headlands which marked the entrance to Hamilton harbor, from which we had come, were several miles away. As we had tacked about in the bay, coming nearer with each new reach to the sea-line, Nellie had pleaded to go outside. "It looks so lovely out there to-day," she said, "and to be really out at sea in a little boat like this!"

I had asked the captain what he thought of it, and, after looking at the sky and the direction of the wind, and then at the eager face that was watching his, he had replied, "I don't mind fo' myself, but dese B'muda wedders is mighty cur'ous, miss, an'—"

"But, captain," Nellie had interrupted, "you know the 'Mermaid' can do anything; and I do so love the sea!"

"Shu' 'nough, shu' 'nough, and de 'Mermaid'

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like you to say dat; de old gal kin do a heap, spesh'ly when she got all her calico on. I'll do jes' as you say, sah," turning to me.

As for me, the pleasure of seeing the old interest in life coming back to Nellie outweighed everything else. Besides, what danger could there be with such a sky and sea?

So we passed the headlands and the great dock-yard and the old British troop-ship anchored in the channel, and stood out to sea.

What wonderful lights and shadows in the changing reefs of coral over which we sailed! Pale, whitish green, with streaks and wavy spaces of agate and amber running through it, and dark olive wreathed and garlanded with pearl, all around us and as far as we could see, like strange shadows of color on the sunlit waters, till we reached them and passed over them, and saw that the "shadows" were the coral reefs made visible in the marvellous clearness of the water.

How soft the air was, and how easy the motion of the little yacht over the long, gentle swell of the sea!

I was lying down on the seat which ran along the sides of the boat at the stern and mingling the feeling of the ocean's loneliness and vastness with the delicious sense of safety in the near-

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ness of the islands yonder, when I heard the captain's voice.

"Lawd ha' mercy on us! We mus' get outer dis!"

He was standing up and looking towards the islands; and my heart seemed to stop beating as my eyes followed his.

The wind had fallen, and came only in fitful spells, filling out the sail for a few moments, and then letting it swing idly to and fro with the swaying of the boat. Everything around us was the same as an hour before; but just visible behind the low-lying islands was a long line of uneven black cloud, with now and then a sudden glimmer of light flashing up from behind it.

"How many miles are we from Hamilton, captain?"

I was thinking of Nellie, and my voice sounded so strange even to myself that I hardly knew it for mine.

"'Bout five t'ousand, wid sech a wind as dis!" he muttered, without changing his position, and as if speaking to himself. "Wid a little gal in de boat, too! Dere's mo' fools livin' dan what's drowned."

Nellie had risen and had put her hand on my shoulder.

"What is it?" she said; and then, as her eyes

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caught the view, "Oh, how perfectly grand! See how the light plays up behind it!"

It did, indeed. The long black line had risen several feet already, and the flashes were so frequent and continuous as to seem one perpetually changing gleam.

Not a sound had reached us. Even the little fitful wind had died entirely away, and there was a strange stillness everywhere.

The captain turned to me. "We's in fo' it, sah; mus' take in de washin' an' put a tuck in her clo'es! De young lady better creep in for'rad an' be out der way."

He ran forward as he spoke and hauled down the jib, and was busy taking a double reef in the main-sail the next minute.

"Nellie, dear, we are going to have a storm. The captain wants you to lie down under the little deck there, forward, where you will be out of harm's way."

She did not speak for a few seconds. She only looked into my eyes,—and I read there, as clearly as if she had spoken, that she was thinking of the mother who would be left alone. Then, with eyes full of tears that she held bravely back, "No, I don't want to go in there; if the boat should go over, I should certainly be drowned. I'll stay with you."

CAP'N JOHNSIN, OF BERMUDA

“All right, miss ; jes’ yo’ crunch down den an’ hold on tight. Dere’s goin’ to be lively times in dis boat befo’ long !”

Captain Johnson was once more by the tiller. He reached under the seat and drew out the conch shell, and turning his face to the appalling, lightning-torn blackness that was rushing swiftly towards us, he sent out a deep booming note over the waves, like a mad challenge to the storm.

The next moment there came a more vivid flash, and then the roll of heavy thunder.

“Ho, ho !” and he chuckled in his strange fashion. “Make mo’ noise ‘n dat myself. Goin’ to make foam fly presen’ly ; bet yo’ las’ shillin’ !”

The whole west was now one sheet of blackness. The sun was hidden ; the water seemed to have turned black, and a strange dark-green light was all around us.

“What are you going to do, captain ?” It was Nellie’s awe-struck voice that asked it.

“Goin’ to make fo’ St. Gawge’s,—las’ chance.”

He had gripped the tiller like a vise, and was looking over his shoulder towards a place where the black water had suddenly turned into a white mist that hid islands and clouds and everything from view.

CAP'N JOHNSIN, OF BERMUDA

“Git down, miss! Hold on fo’ yo’ life, sah! Now, den!”

There was a blaze of lightning and what seemed the crash of a thousand thunders; and the little yacht was lifted up and shot forward as if flung from a catapult, in a wild, raging, whirling confusion of mist and spray and mad, racing waves.

The shock had flung me from my seat, and I lay in the bottom of the boat, or rather off the bottom, for she was almost over as she raced like a wild, frightened thing through the hissing foam and fury of the storm.

Nellie was lying near me, clinging with both hands to an iron ring in the inside sheathing, her white face turned to the sky, where no sky was, but only spume and spray driven pitilessly onward. I lay there, half-stunned by my fall and the awful tumult around me, and looked up at the captain.

He had thrown himself against the tiller, and was holding it over with all his weight and strength, the cords and muscles of his neck and arms showing tense as steel. His precious hat was gone, and his head bent down against the wind, and streaming with the waves that broke and dashed all over him.

How long it was, I do not know. Nellie,

CAP'N JOHNSIN, OF BERMUDA

home, friends, death, and life, each distinct and all together at once were upon my brain. It seemed as eternity—it seemed only a moment—till the captain suddenly let go the helm, and was on one knee beside Nellie, and shouting in her ear,—

“Let go dat ring, an’ do jes’ I tell you! Put yo’ arms roun’ my waist, dat’s it, stan’ up an’ get outer deck wid me, quick,—dis boat gone ter hebbien in a minute!”

So sudden was it all that, as I sprang to my feet, I saw the captain and Nellie already standing on the little forward deck, his two strong hands holding hers. I saw in that same moment the wild, seething waves and a black something ahead that seemed falling upon us out of the white shroud of the spray; and I heard, or seemed to hear, a shout of “Now, den, jump!”

Then I knew no more.

“De good Lawd be praised! he’s gwine to come roun’ yit.”

I opened my eyes and looked slowly around me. I was lying on a bed in a small room, and an old negress was bending over me. A younger woman was near her; and—yes, at the foot of the bed was “Cap’n Johnsion,” his head bound up with a towel, but large as life and

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grinning from ear to ear as he met my wondering eyes.

"Dat's it, sah; nebber say die! But you come mighty close to it, sah."

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked around the room. I wanted to say, "And Nellie?" but I could not frame the words. But the old negress understood and gently pushed me down again.

"Yo' young missis is all safe, sah; she was dat done out an' dead-like when de cap'n carried her up heah, dat she couldn't eben t'nk. She's in de nex' room, sah; an', bress her heart, a-sleepin' like an angel."

I closed my eyes and thanked God. And then, as I closed them, I saw once more the storm-swept sea, and the yacht, and the great darkness coming towards us,—and then I looked again at Captain Johnson.

"How did I get here?"

For the first time that day he looked awkward and constrained.

"Jes' so, sah. Dere war a cove, sah, dat I knowed of—in St. Gawge's—al'ays knowed it by de big black cliff, sah. An' I made fo' it, hopin' de Lawd bring me inter it. But I miss it, sah; leas'wise de spray blin' me so, I don' see no cove. An' den I see what comin', an' I

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tuk de young miss an' jump ; an' de swash war runnin' like a ribber, an' swep' us roun' an' inter dat same old cove ! An' mos' knock de brains outer me again' a rock."

He put his hand to his head, and touched the towel.

" But me ? How did I——"

" Jes' so, sah. I laid de miss on de groun', an' run back—an' dere's you comin', no end fust an' all ober like ! an' I catch you by de leg as you come in on de swash—an' here you is, sah."

" And the boat ?"

" Gone ter hebben, sah. Dere wasn' nothin' lef' her when she strike dat cliff !"

An hour afterwards we were all together before the fire, in the room where I had first gained consciousness. Nellie, dressed in the Sunday garments of the younger hostess, and looking very quaint as she sat in a big arm-chair ; I sitting near her, and Captain Johnson, standing at the corner of the open fireplace.

" Yes, captain," Nellie was saying. " You are right, after all ; it was the mercy of heaven that brought us through. But," and she smiled at him gratefully, " but I'm sorry you lost your hat."

The " cap'n " put one hand to his breast, and,

CAP'N JOHNSIN OF BERMUDA

after some shuffling, brought out his battered hat from under his jersey, where he had evidently put it in the first moment of disaster,—the rose crushed, and the feathers soaked and draggled.

He turned it over and over, and squeezed the water out of it between his hands. “I wouldn’ ha’ lost dem fedders fo’ de whole boat. I t’ought heap o’ dat ar chick’n,—I did !”

Despite this rude experience, we had the satisfaction of seeing Nellie continue to gain in health ; and in another boat, in whose fitting out I was glad to have a hand, “the cap’n” often took us out—a bit more cautiously, perhaps—over those strangely-tinted Bermudan waters.

“A Close Shave”

“WELL, I reckon you might call it so,—
it *was* a close shave and no mistake.”

The speaker was sitting on the “treasure-box” of the Wells and Fargo Express Company, in the express-car of a train bound east on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fé Railroad. I had gone back into the baggage-car to make sure that my trunk-checks were all right (for the hack-driver in Denver had attended to checking them for me, and I wanted to be certain that there was no mistake), and my attention was so taken by a man in the rear compartment of the car that I stood still awhile and looked at him. The car was divided by a partition, the forward part being devoted to “baggage” and the after part to “express;” and through the open door I saw a man sitting on a heavily-ironed box, and carefully cleaning a revolver; a wiry but muscular-seeming man with short, grayish hair, a dark moustache also sprinkled with gray, keen, dark eyes, and a look about his face that told of firmness and daring,—the kind of man you

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would like to know was near you if you were ever in a fight against odds.

I watched him for a few minutes as he worked at his revolver, and then, with the freedom of travel on the far western roads fifteen years ago, I went into the compartment where he was and sat down on some mail-bags near him.

As a way to opening conversation I offered him a cigar, and said, "You are the express agent, I suppose."

"Yes," he replied, laconically, laying down the pistol to light the cigar, and then taking it up again, with a nod to me as a kind of silent "Thank you."

"Have you been long with the company?"

"A good many years; used to run on the stages before the railroad crossed the plains."

"So!"

He made no reply, and I presently tried another entering wedge: "You don't expect to have to use that revolver, do you?"

"No," he answered, trying the lock as he spoke. "Not much chance for it these days,—but one never knows. It may be a long time before you need it; but when you do need it you need it bad."

"More chance for it then, in the old staging days?" I hinted.

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"Y-e-s," he said, slowly, as he put the cartridges into their places. "In them days it was six hundred miles of plains, with only horses to get you over them; and the stations pretty far apart; and roving bands of Indians apt as not to lay for the stage that they knew would be along somewhere. And there wasn't much sleepin' time for a man with gold bullion to take care of,—let alone his own hair. It used to be nip and tuck *them* days. I mind one time——" The cigar was having its effect; it was a good cigar, one of a special lot I had laid in for this trip, and he now knocked the ash off carefully and stopped, looking at it. "If you'd care to hear——?"

I *did* care to hear very much, and I told him so.

"Well, 'taint much to tell, perhaps, after all; but it was lively, as far as it went. *I ain't* likely to forget it.

"The stage road lay along about here, followin' the Arkansaw, pretty much as the railroad does now. We could strike water for the horses this way, and anyhow here the road was. The passengers would ride inside, and me and the driver would be on the box in front, taking turns in driving, and keeping a sort of general lookout, especially when we got near the timber

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along the river where the red devils might be waiting for us. Sometimes we did have a scrimmage with them; but they were cowardly rascals, and seldom cared to come to close quarters with a stage full of white men with guns and revolvers, and ready for 'em.

"But one time they was a little too much for us. You see, there were soldiers at one of the stations,—a kind of fort-like,—and they'd had a brush with the Indians, and the story of it had been brought in by the last stage from the States to Denver: and when the stage was ready to start for the east, next day, not a passenger would go,—didn't care to risk it till they got some more news.

"But the stage'd got to go; and, as luck would have it, *I* had to go, there being a special lot of gold to send that day; and so me and Bob had the whole stage to ourselves. Bob was the driver; a cheery, good-natured chap as I ever knowed, and a rare one to handle the ribbons. I mind, that morning, how he looked after the hitchin' himself, and tried every strap and buckle, and patted the horses, and pulled their ears, and spoke to 'em, just as if they was human and could understand him. Bob always 'lowed they *did*,—but that has nothing to do with the story.

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"There was a lot of men standing round to see us off; but instead of the usual fun and joking when the stage'd start, they shook hands with us in a solemn kind of way, and hoped we'd get through all right: it was kind of dismal. But when Bob climbed onto the box and took up the reins, and the four horses broke into a canter down the street, with me sittin' beside him, and the empty stage rattlin' behind us, they all gave a cheer; and we took off our hats and waved them back to them,—and pretty soon we were all alone, with six hundred miles of desert and sage-brush before us.

"I won't say we were scared; but we were a little anxious. It looked as if the Indians were stronger and bolder than usual,—that their brush with the soldiers: but we were well armed, havin' two repeatin' rifles and revolvers apiece, and we had two pair of as good eyes for Indians as were in all Colorado.

"So we weren't scared,—not a bit; but we put our rifles handy, and loosened the revolvers that were strapped around our waists.

And by and by, when mile after mile went away from under us, and the crisp October air was all around us, and the Spanish Peaks stood out fifty miles away on the right, but lookin' as if just close to us,—well, you've been out here

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and you know how it is, and what an October morning in this Colorado country means.

"But, as I was sayin', we got to jokin' and tellin' stories of time and ag'in when we'd licked the Indians off; until, what with the stories and the air and the horses rattlin' ahead of us, we got to wishin' that the red devils would try it on and see what two white men could do for 'em.

"We got to the first station without anything unusual happening. It was only a few shanties and a stable and a rough sort of eatin'-house, all heaped together like, and a kind of stockade built around 'em. They was just for changin' teams and such like, and not much to look at; and when we clattered up and the men came out with fresh horses, before we could speak they called out to us,—

"Hello, fellows! Glad to see you alive. What's the luck?"

"Luck's all right," says I; "but nary passenger to-day, boys. What's the word about them Indians?"

"Haven't heard sence the last stage went west. No eastern stage in to-day and that looks kinder squally."

"Some talk went on while the horses were being changed, and we were getting our dinner, mostly 'bout the fight we'd heard of and the

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chances ahead for us; and then, with warnings from the station-men to keep our eyes peeled (and they were tolerable certain to keep peeled after hearin' that the stage which was to meet us hadn't got in), we got up again and soon left the station behind us.

"We had twenty miles to go before we reached the next post, and then Bob and me would lay off for the night and take a rest spell; and as the next station was the fort, and there was soldiers there,—a company of cavalry,—we didn't look much to meet any Indians till we were a good stretch on the other side.

"But we were mistaken.

"The plain was just about as level as your hand. A good ways to the right we could see the Arkansaw, like gray-white ribbon, edged here and there with cotton-woods and brush; but on the left, and behind us and before us, the plain stretched away until it met the sky with a kind of gray, curled grass lyin' close to the ground, and dotted with sage-brush here and there. Nothin' could come within miles of us without being seen in time.

"And mebbe it was the hasty dinner I'd had, or the horses trottin' steadily ahead, or the jinglin' of the harness; but I says at last to Bob, 'Bob, there ain't no use in two of us

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sittin' up here and gettin' cramps in our legs for nothin', with an empty stage under us. Supposin' I go inside and take a little snooze? We had an awful early start this mornin', and I was up most all night; and if you see anythin' suspicious just blow your horn,' says I, 'and I'll be with you in no time.'

"All right, Jim,' says Bob; "'tain't no use, as you say, and I'll sound up lively if I see anythin'.'

"So he drew in the horses, and I climbed down and got into the stage and stretched myself out comfortable all over it, and soon wasn't nowhere. Well, I don't know how long I'd been asleep, and to this day I don't know what had happened to Bob. Mebbe he had gone to sleep too; for them drivers could hold the reins and drive on, fast asleep, and their hands 'd somehow keep awake and know what they was doing; or mebbe he was lookin' the wrong way and taken sudden like. I don't know, and no one will ever know now.

"All I know is that I was waked with the quick, sharp 'crack-crack-crack' of rifles and a sudden lurch of the stage that threw me on the floor. I was up on my knees and lookin' out of the door the next second. The door was half glass, and the glass was down, like an open win-

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dow (you've seen them stages). And this is what I saw :

"The road had turned down close to the trees and bush by the river ; but the stage had left the road and was tearing out over the plain, the horses on a gallop and everything rattlin' like mad. The Indians, not less than fifty of them, mounted on ponies and swingin' their guns and yellin' like fifty thousand devils, were gallopin' along on both sides of the stage and behind in—in easy rifle distance ; and I tell you it wasn't exactly the nicest situation in the world to be shut up in a stage and takin' a free ride to nowhere, with them Indians' fixin's thrown in. It was the biggest circus I'd ever seen, and all under one tent.

"I saw in a minute what they was up to. I knew by the sun being pretty low that we weren't far off the fort, and that the Indians meant to drive the stage-team 'way out on the plains ; and not knowin' how many men might be inside it, and being always skeery of their own hides, they just kept screechin' and yellin' and gallopin' along and makin' our team tear faster.

"What did I think ? Well, I don't know, stranger, that I thought of anything. It isn't exactly the time to sit down quiet and think it over. I reckon at such times men do the actin' first and think it over afterwards. But I'll tell

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you one thing,—I ain't much of a religious man, and I don't lay no claim to it,—but ever since that day I have believed in God."

He stopped speaking and thoughtfully relighted his cigar, which had gone out while he was talking, and then again took up his story.

"I had nothin' with me but my two revolvers, and they wasn't no use, even if I could have hit the screamin' devils at that distance; for they would have seen there was only one man, and would have closed in, and then it was all up with me. My rifle was on the box with Bob; and as I'd heard no shot nor sound from him, and from the way the horses were tearin' along I knew that he either wasn't there or was lyin' there dead, brought down by the shots that had woke me.

"It didn't take half as long to see all this as it does to tell it. I saw it all in a kind of flash that first second I looked out of the door-window, and the next second I was half way out of that window, *clean* out of it, and swinging myself by one hand up onto the driver's seat. The stage swung frightful, and it was no easy job to do it; but I knew that my one hope was to turn the horses towards the fort and fight the yellin' savages till I got where the scouts around the fort could see us.

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"When I got onto the box, no Bob was there. The Indians stopped screechin' when they saw me, seemin' to be dumfounded at a man climbin' up to his certain death; but it was only for a minute,—as long as you could take a quick breath.

"The reins had fallen down over the foot-board and were caught on the pole just below, and I reached over to catch them, and at that minute came the crack of twenty rifles, and the horses gave an extra leap, and I pitched forward over the foot-board down among the flyin' hoofs and wheels, and then I lay there like a dead man on the plain.

"At first I thought I *was* dead, the whole thing was so sudden; but not a hoof nor a wheel had touched me, and that leap of the horses had so far saved me, for there wasn't the scratch of a bullet on me either, so far as I could feel.

"I didn't dare raise my head, I didn't even open my eyes; but for a minute or two my ears could hear the grass growin'.

"I was lyin' on my face, just as I fell, and I expected every minute to feel a hand in my hair and the knife cuttin' around it; but it didn't come, and I could tell by the rattle of the stage growin' fainter, and the yells goin'

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along with it, that the Indians supposed they had shot me when I fell, and that now they were after the others who they thought were inside.

"I lay there listenin', flat on my face, and not darin' to move. They might come back, or mebbe there were stragglers behind; and if I got up and tried to run for it, they had eyes like hawks and I'd surely be seen on that flat plain, and I'd have no chance against their ponies. So I lay there listenin' a while longer, and then I lifted my head just enough to get my eyes so that I could see out a little.

"They had gone after the stage, sure enough, and were still yellin' and gallopin' along with it and firin' at it every now and then, but not goin' too near it, not bein' sure, you see, that the men inside were not waitin' for a good chance to knock them over. But I knew that wouldn't last much longer, and then they were dead certain to come back after my scalp, which they were tolerable sure to get if I stayed there and kept it ready for them.

"So I turned my head round slow and looked behind me. The sun was gone down and things was gettin' a little dim, but I could see where the river was by the trees and brush that I told you of, and I wasn't long in makin' up my mind to get there and take cover.

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"So I sort of shoved myself around, and started crawling. I'd reach out my hands and grab the grass-roots, and then pull myself along with my head flat down, for I didn't dare at first to raise it, except to see that I was goin' straight. But I got tired of that way of travellin' after a few rods or so, and I ventured a little run on my hands and knees, droppin' down flat again after every run. Then I made the runs longer and a little longer, and my heart was fairly in my mouth, sort of chokin' me, when the last run carried me into the brush, and I saw the branches of the cotton-woods above me as I lay panting on the ground.

"But it wasn't long till my heart was in my mouth another way. The brush was very high and the fringe of trees was pretty thin; cotton-woods ain't much of trees any way. I had gone to the edge of the river for a drink, for I was dry as dust and 'most dead for water, and if I could have swum I'd have taken to the river and tried to get off that way; but I didn't know how, and I lay there a while, thinkin' of the next thing to do. If the brush had gone any length along the stream nothing would have been easier to do than to work along through it to the fort; but it was only a patch like, and then the plain was all open again; and, besides, the full moon

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was up now, and you know how the moonlight is 'most clear as sunlight out here, sort of steel-white, like them electric lights on poles they have East now.

"So I got up, and was goin' to the other side to have a look at the plain, movin' along slow and cautious, when all of a sudden I heard the 'thud-thuddy-thud' of horses' hoofs, so close that they must have come up while I was drinkin' and thinkin' at the river, and I dropped on my hands and knees as if I'd been shot, and had another game of listenin' to the grass growin'.

"I couldn't see out through the bushes; but they must have seen the branches wavin' as I came through 'em, for they had come to a stop outside and seemed to be consultin'. I could hear their jabber, and one of 'em, who seemed to be the chief, was giving orders, only I couldn't make out anythin', never havin' been a hand for pickin' up Indian language; but I could hear the trottin' around of the ponies, and I guessed they was afraid to try me on foot, and were gettin' up some stratagem in those sneakin' heads of theirs.

"But if they thought they was goin' to have me for nothing, they was going to be curiously mistaken. I took out my two revolvers and

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cocked 'em, taking one in each hand, and rising up on my knees ; I daren't stand up, 'cause my head would come above the bushes, and I daren't move round 'cause the shakin' of the bushes would have drawed their fire and I'd have been riddled as full of holes as a corn-sieve ; so I faced 'em on my knees and waited for their deviltry to begin.

"I heard some more sounds of talkin', and I'd given one of my six-shooters to have understood what they was sayin', and have knowed what they was up to ; but they was talkin' low and whisperin' like, so that, even if I'd knowed their lingo, I wouldn't have been any wiser.

"Then I heard what sounded like men getting off their horses and the 'click' of carbines, and I knowed by the sounds that they was spread considerable along the front ; and then,—great sakes ! will I ever forget it ?—then came a voice of thunder, '*Surrender*, you infernal redskins, or I'll send you to the devil, where you belong !'

"Yell ? Well, I guess they thought for a minute they'd struck a whole tribe !

"I flung down my revolvers and jumped up and rushed out through the bushes, calling out who I was ; and if they wasn't the most surprised troop of Uncle Sam's cavalry ! Well, blow me,

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there they were, standing out in the moonlight clear as day, and as much taken aback at seein' who they'd been ambushin' as I was to see who had been ambushin' *me*.

"You see, they'd been anxious at the fort 'bout the stage coming, and when it wasn't sharp on time the colonel had sent out the troop to look for it, and while they was skirmishin' round, one of 'em had seen the bushes waving and signalled the rest, and that's how they thought they'd got the redskins corralled instead of me.

"The stage? Oh, yes, they got the stage all right, all that was left of it; the horses were gone, and every bit of leather cut off and the insides all ripped up and carried away. The treasure-box was all right, too; they didn't have no way to carry off a heavy thing like that, and it wouldn't have been no use to 'em, anyway.

"But that fallin' down over them horses, and the pitch they gave as them rifles were fired, and not a hoof nor a wheel to touch me!"

"It was a close call," I said, as I got up from the mail-bags on which I had been sitting; "it is next to a miracle that you are alive to tell it."

"Well," he replied, smiling grimly, "I reckon you might call it so. It *was* a close shave and no mistake."

The Reverend Mr. Higginton's Prize Story

THE Reverend Joel Higginton was sitting before the fire with "The Young Folks' Comrade" in his hand. It was an evening in March, and the wind whistled down the gulch and whirled sand and dust into the faces of the miners and stamp-mill men coming home from their work, till their cheeks and eyes smarted as if fine needles had been thrown at them.

They did not mind it; nobody minded anything up there in the Rocky Mountains so long as the yellow gold could be taken from the hills and the stamp-mills kept up their steady pounding.

The minister sitting in his study was not even conscious that the windows were almost rattling their panes out. He was not reading: the hand that held the paper had fallen to his side, and he was staring absent-mindedly into the fire. His wife was sitting opposite, darning a stocking and softly humming a tune.

"I believe," said the minister, suddenly, "I believe I could do it. There's no harm in try-

MR. HIGGINTON'S PRIZE STORY

ing, anyway ; and it's a small fortune if I should happen to win."

His wife stopped humming and looked up : " What are you thinking of doing, dear ? "

" Well, h'mm ; there's a list of prizes offered here, in this paper ; a lot of money,—big and little,—and it seems to be just in my line."

" What are the prizes for ? For sermons or book agencies or something ? "

" No, no," he answered, impatiently, for the idea had taken strong hold of him. " The prizes are given for stories,—a special prize for the best minister's story. I believe I can write a good one. I've got the plan of a first-rate one in my mind."

The partner of his bosom let the stocking fall into her lap and stared across at him. " Joel Higginton ! A prize story ? " Her look changed to one of anxiety : " You have been working too hard, lately, and your mind is unsettled, dear. Better take a good hot mustard bath, and go to bed early to-night."

Mr. Higginton was a little nettled at both the look and the tone. " You needn't look at me, Maria, as if you thought I'd lost my senses. I know what I'm about. Here is an offer of a thousand dollars for the first prize,—and why shouldn't I get it as well as anybody ? "

MR. HIGGINTON'S PRIZE STORY

"But you never wrote a story in your life, Joel!"

"Well, it's time I began, then. It's all perfectly simple. The story is to have only three thousand words, and it is to be taken from a minister's own life, and there mustn't be the least bit of love or religion in it."

"Good land! a minister's story, and not a bit of religion in it? What kind of a heathenish minister do they take you to be?"

"Oh, it's all right,—I think I know what they mean. I've got just the kind of story they want in my head. And the thousand dollars, Maria, will send John to college. You know how we've worked and saved and prayed for that the last three years."

The good wife sighed, and began to slowly darn the stocking again. "Yes, dear; we've tried hard, and we are as far away from it as ever. If you only could get it, Joel!" and she looked at him wistfully: "but I'm afraid it takes a lot of experience to do that sort of thing."

"Not a bit of it," he answered, cheerfully; "all you need is to have an idea in your mind,—and then all the rest is easy. 'Strike while the iron is hot,' says an old proverb, and I'm going at it now while the spirit is on me."

He got up and lighted the lamp, and arranged

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paper and pens and ink upon the table, and sat down in a pleasurable excitement to begin his work. Mrs. Higginton caught the infection of his eagerness, and turned her chair so that she might watch him, and her darning-needle clicked faster as she began to measure what his success would mean to their only son.

He wrote steadily for more than an hour, with occasional pauses, when he would stare intently at the ceiling with half-shut eyes. Once he stopped to say, "A story has to be bright and pointed. Most of the stories that I've seen lately are too dull and prosy; but I've got something here, I think, that will arouse interest from the start." At last he pushed back his chair: "This is the way it begins. I will read it to you, and you can tell me what you think of it."

He began to read, with something of a nervous tremor in his voice: "A Clear Case of Providence." That is the title. I must have something striking, you know, to arrest attention.

"In the year 1620 the ship 'Mayflower' was ploughing the mighty deep, and the noble band of heroes was assembled in the cabin. The tenets of their faith had been strengthened by the efforts of Laud to restrict the freedom of

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the so-called Dissenters in their worship; and their distinctive Calvinistic doctrines had taken stronger hold upon their consciences—— Eh? What did you say?" The needle had given a sharp click and had suddenly stopped, and he looked up inquiringly.

"Why, Joel, that doesn't sound like a story; and don't you think that you've got some religion in it already?"

"Pshaw,—you don't know anything about it! This is only the introduction. I have to make things plain to begin with, and what I've written is to prepare the mind for what comes after. I've only got the introduction done, so far."

"How many words have you written?"

"I don't know. I'll count them and see." He ran his pen over the words, checking them off two at a time. Then he looked down at the sheets of paper and across at his wife dubiously. "I've written fifteen hundred."

"That's half the story,—and the story hasn't begun yet. How will you ever get it in?"

He turned over the written sheets in a puzzled kind of way. "I guess I'll have to leave out some of the opening part of it. But it really belongs to the story."

"Hadn't you better start over again and begin at the other end?"

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"Maria!" he said, impressively, "you had better attend to your stockings, and leave the story-writing to me. I think I understand my own business."

But his wife's hint had given him a new idea, and he took fresh paper and began once more; writing more slowly this time, with more frequent pauses and many erasures and corrections as he went on. At the end of half an hour he gathered up his papers and turned triumphantly to his waiting listener. "I've got it now. I haven't got very far; but all I needed was to get a start. I'll swing along now. This is the way it goes.

"A store-keeper in Central City, named Mason, had failed in business and had sold everything he had to pay his debts. He had paid every dollar due his creditors, but he had left himself and his family penniless. He knew nothing about mining; but, as he lived in the gold country, he got a pick and a pan and went over to Jim Creek to prospect for gold. A little mining had been done along Jim Creek, and it had never paid well; but it was the only place where all the claims were not taken, and he went over there to see what he could do."

"That's as far as I've got."

"But, Joel, that's all true: Mr. Mason, poor

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man, called here to say good-by two weeks ago. That isn't a story."

"Not a story? I'd like to know what it is, then! A story must have a basis of fact, you know."

"And what are you going to make out of it? What is the next thing?"

"The next thing? I—well—I don't exactly know. I don't seem to—to see my way exactly." He rubbed his left ear thoughtfully. "I might work Mrs. Mason and the children in somehow. A story needs something pathetic in it—to make a contrast."

"And what has this to do with the 'Mayflower' and the heroes and all that?"

"Maria, you are a good woman, but you don't know anything about writing stories. This is a different thing altogether, and the 'Mayflower' doesn't come in."

At that moment there came a knock at the outer door, and Mrs. Higginton went to answer it. She came back with a miner who lived next door, and who often dropped in to spend the evening. The visitor sat down, and, after a few general remarks, turned to the minister, who was still sitting by the table.

"Writing your sermon, I see. It beats me how you can write so many sermons; but you

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won't have so much of a congregation to preach to next Sunday, I reckon. There's goin' to be a regular stampede over to Jim Creek."

"To Jim Creek?" Mr. Higginton and his wife exchanged glances. "What has happened over there?"

"Haven't you heard? Why, that man Mason, who doesn't know blossom-rock from a cobble-stone, has hit his luck and struck it rich, they say. Beats all how some men chance them things."

"Has he really found gold?"

"Found it? He's up to his neck in it, if all they say is true. You know what he done,—how he cleaned out his last dollar, house and furniture and everything, to pay what he owed. He's straight, Mason is. A prayin' chap, too; not my kind, you know, parson,—but one can't help believin' in a man that lives it out square like him. And they say that he prayed over in Jim Creek to be showed the right spot, and that, by crackey, he hit it the first time! If there was anything in that way o' doin', the whole minin' country'd be down on its knees. Anyways, he struck it rich, and he's called his mine 'The Providence,' so there might be something in it after all."

When the visitor had gone, Mr. Higginton

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addressed his wife. "There, Maria, the whole story is plain now, and I can write it easily. That praying and being led to the right spot was very remarkable. I'll make a great hit with it."

"But that would bring in religion, Joel, and you said that the story mustn't have any religion in it."

He looked at her blankly. "Y-e-s,—that's so. I'll have to leave that out, and it's the most interesting thing in the whole of it." He studied over what he had already written, and then threw it impatiently down, "Blame take it! this story-writing isn't half as easy as it looks!"

"Joel!" the tone was one of shocked surprise.

"Well, I don't care, Maria. If he had tossed a nickel, 'heads or tails,' for his old mine, it would have been all right; but now it's all wrong, and it mustn't go into the story! Why, it spoils the whole thing, and if I had my way——"

The study-door opened, and a bright-looking lad of seventeen years came in and took a seat by the fire. "It's a howling night," he said, with a pleasant smile; "but I was paid for my walk to the post-office. I got a letter from Mr. Mason, from Jim Creek. He wants me to go over there; he says that he can give me something to do."

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His mother showed her surprise and pleasure in her face. "Why, that's fine, John! We've been thinking about you all evening, and your father is working now at a plan for sending you to college. But if it fails, you will have made a start in business, anyway."

"Oh, it isn't much," he replied; "just to keep tally of the amount of ore that's taken out, and such things; the wages will be small. But what is the plan?" he asked, turning to his father.

Mr. Higginton fumbling his papers without replying, his wife broke in, "He is writing a prize story. He expects to get a thousand dollars, and the queer thing is that it is all about Mr. Mason and his finding the mine."

John's face had much the same expression as his mother's at the minister's first announcement of his intention. "Writing a story! You can write rattling good sermons, father, but I shouldn't think that stories were much in your line."

"Oh, it's a very simple matter," replied Mr. Higginton, brightening up again at the frank admission of his power as a sermon writer. "All one needs is to have something interesting to tell, and then to—to—well, to tell it in the right way,—in short, to make a story of it."

"That sounds easy," said John. "And you

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must know a lot of interesting things. Let's hear how it goes."

Mr. Higginton glaced uncertainly at the papers on the table. "I—I've only just begun it. I didn't know until this evening of Mr. Mason's good fortune. But I began with the account of his sad failure here, and now it will be the simplest thing in the world to make a story out of it."

"Of course it will!" cried John, enthusiastically. "I see it all. You'll make him find a vein of solid gold two hundred feet thick, or buy an island in the South Sea full of diamonds and pirates; or fall down the shaft and kill himself, and the mine be closed up by an earthquake. You've got a big chance in that story. It's great!"

His father looked at him in something like dismay. The imaginative vein in Mr. Higginton had never been cultivated, and anything like these startling climaxes had not entered his mind; but they seemed to open possibilities.

"You think," he said, doubtfully, "that an ending like that would take best?"

"It will take like a house a-fire. It's a young people's paper, you know, and that's just what they want. Put in plenty of pirates,—the more pirates you get in the better!"

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"My dear Joel," said Mrs. Higginton, "there can't be any pirates in a 'minister's story,'—unless he was a missionary among cannibals, or something. And besides——"

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mr. Higginton; "it's all plain as a book now. I'll just make an outline of it, and then I'll have nothing to do but fill it in. Don't say anything now to call my mind away from it."

He arranged his papers once more and began to write, with brooding silences between the scratchings of his pen. After a while, his wife went quietly from the room, beckoning to John to follow; and when she looked in again for a silent "good-night," Mr. Higginton was still bending with knitted brows over the table. The fire had been dead for an hour and the lamp was flickering out for want of oil when he at last laid down his pen. He had written and changed and rearranged his outline till he had it to his liking; and the lamp had given its last flicker when he finally gave up his work for that night, with the pleased consciousness that it fulfilled every condition.

The outline ran as follows:

1. Mr. Mason fails in business and goes prospecting to Jim Creek.
2. He finds a rich mine and resolves to con-

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vert cannibals. (N.B.—Leave out the praying, and say as little about the converting as possible.)

3. He sails for the South Seas and takes a missionary along. The ship stops at an unknown island full of pirates and diamonds. Some of the pirates are converted and the rest killed. (N.B.—Not sure about the killing; might be better to convert them all.)

4. They load the ship with diamonds. An earthquake swallows up the islands and the ship, and the missionary escapes on a raft to tell the tale. (N.B.—Have the raft made ready in time; couldn't make it in an earthquake. Perhaps would improve the story to have the missionary swallowed up too.)

"There," he said to himself. "It has a basis of fact, and it brings in John's pirates and the earthquake,—that was a capital idea, and it's a minister's story besides. There's no love in it, and very little religion, and there's plenty of pirates. It ought to take the first prize!" And he went to bed and fell asleep calculating how far a thousand dollars would carry John through college.

He could talk of nothing else at breakfast next morning; and when John was on the stage and the driver cracked his whip and shouted,

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"All aboard for the new gold-fields!" Mr. Higginton called out cheerily, "Good-by, my son; we'll have our own gold-field very soon."

He worked steadily at the story for the next few days, and at length the precious manuscript was finished, and carefully copied, and sent away. Three months was the period named by the editors for the examination of competing stories; and though he could not hope to have news of it before the appointed time, he had it continually in mind, and fairly bore down his wife's doubts and fears by the strength of his own convictions. As the fatal day drew near he was restless and expectant. He was at the post-office half an hour ahead of time; and when the distribution of the mail began he kept his eye on his own box, and when a letter was put in it sideways, he tried to see under it and to make out where it was from. When the box-window opened and he received his mail, he would even ask the postmaster if he was sure that everything which belonged to him was there.

It happened once that the night mail had not arrived; some accident had delayed it,—and, after waiting an hour, he had arranged with the postmaster to send his letters to the house in the morning before breakfast. When he came

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to the table in the morning, there were several letters and newspapers by his plate, but he had eyes for only one; and he looked at that one with a stunned sort of feeling in his head and a queer choke in his throat.

It was a large, square, yellow envelope, and in the upper left-hand corner were the printed words, "The Young Folk's Comrade."

He took it up with trembling fingers and opened it. Yes, it was the manuscript which he had sent three months before; and with it was a formal, printed slip,—kindly worded but unmistakable in meaning. "The editors regret that the enclosed manuscript is not available for their magazine, but they thank you for submitting it in competition for the prizes offered for the best minister's story."

He tried to smile in a feeble way, and looked waveringly at his wife, who was sitting opposite. "They—it—the story is sent back. They say it isn't available."

Mrs. Higginton seemed to have changed her mind about it suddenly. "Never mind, dear. I'm sure it was as good as the best of them; and you never can tell how those things are managed. It *ought* to have taken the prize, anyway." And she poured a good cup of coffee and passed it over to him. "There's a letter

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there from John, and another in a handwriting I don't know. Let us hear what our boy has to say."

He opened the other first and glanced at it, and then read it again slowly, with such an expression on his face that his wife could wait no longer. "What in the world is it, and what makes you look so?"

"It's—it's from Mr. Mason. Listen to this, Maria."

"MY DEAR MR. HIGGINTON,—I had a talk with your son last night, and he told me of your writing a prize story about me and mine, in the hope of getting money to send him to college. I don't take much stock in the story-writing business. But I know you and your work, and I've taken a great liking for John, and so far as the money is concerned, I'll see John through college, and I know he will be a credit to us all. Please let me know if this is agreeable to you; and don't think it's any great thing for me to do, for I have been blessed beyond all expectation.

"Sincerely yours,

"R. MASON."

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Then Mrs. Higginton smiled through her tears. "And

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it was your story, after all, that did it, Joel. It took the first prize."

"So it did," he replied, tapping the rejected manuscript cheerfully with his finger. "It is 'a clear case of Providence.' "

THE END.

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